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Vol. LIV No. 1

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To Knights of the double-rail



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Men leave home today for approximately similar reasons, but instead of lances and shields, they carry briefcases, conference material and orderbooks.

Which brings us at once to our favorite subject of soap.

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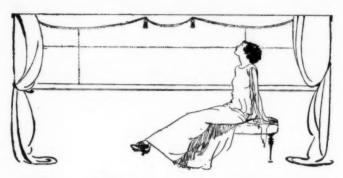
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AINSLEE'S

VOL. LIV.

SEPTEMBER, 1924.

No. 1.



The Mystery at Xanadu

By Beatrice Ravenel

Author of "The Elimination of Fernando,"
"His Last Appearance," etc.

The man who has reached the age of forty without having accumulated a secret, is either more or less than human.—From the Cynical Maxims of Major Roderick Laurel.

CHAPTER I.

RARLY one afternoon John Vandervenne Betterton stood on the steps of the Crothers' house, straight on his way to the devil.

No aspersion on the house is intended by the foregoing statement. It was the sort of edifice which house agents delight to honor, by listing it as "a mansion in the most desirable residential section of New York." The section was more than desirable; it was that part of Park Avenue which leaves nothing to be desired. The value of its frontage compelled respect, and its façade expressed the solidity, social and financial, for which the name of Andrew Crothers was a satisfactory guarantee. The note of fashion had been added, made manifest in overflowing window boxes and the impressively delicate richness of the draperies behind them. This touch had been superimposed only during the current year. There was a new Mrs. Crothers, and she was young.

The sinister personage mentioned in the first paragraph, the destinataire of Johnny Batterton's finish, was, therefore, not waiting inside for him. He had come along, with a touching solicitude, to help initiate him in the next step of his career. Indeed, as poor Johnny gave a cursory back glance on that career, he could not accurately select the moment when his traveling companion had emerged from the void and undoubtedly fallen into step. It was as though he had always been there, taking, if not a benevolently paternal, at least an artistic, interest in him.

Not that Johnny had been guilty of anything unpardonable, so far. He assured himself of that with a retrospective self-respect which was all the warmer because of his own suspicion that he might not be able to make use of it much longer. Up to the present, his behavior had been, if not admirable, at least law-abiding. The sum total made for regret, rather than remorse. It hadn't been a rake's progress, by any means; it had been the effort of a young man, born and bred among what are called the best conditions, to make a living.

But the whole effect wasn't what he had intended his life to be; not the least in the world. That was the worst of it, and a farther worse lay in the tendency which it was displaying to depart even more drastically from that early design. He felt about himself as he had sometimes felt about a piece of work which had to be hurried over and scamped, so as not to miss its market. He had never wanted to hear of those transactions again, had felt an absolute distaste for them. The time might come when he would feel a similar distaste for himself. He knew men who seemed to regard their own personalities with a bitter twist of the mouth and a bad taste inside it.

It had been compromise, compromise, all the way; giving in a bit here, readjusting one's predilections there, until one stood definitely at the parting of the ways. A vague memory came to him of something Joseph Conrad had written about a shadow line that appears occasionally in a man's affairs, a pausing place, where old habits and circumstances changed, and a new sort of life began. In the case of Conrad's hero the line had heralded his first command of a ship; in his, Johnny's, case, the matter was very different: the word "shadow" took on a secondary and uneasy meaning.

The door opened. An elderly

servant, such as one might expect to find in that house, expressing with calm immovability his expectation of growing old along with it, gave Johnny the glance which does not seem to scrutinize, but which takes in everything. Satisfied by the visitor's appearance, he accepted his card and ushered him through the hall. It must be explained that the air and aura of Johnny were those of a man about town.

The room into which he was introduced, and where he was abandoned, reminded him of nothing so much as a battlefield on which the past and the present had had an Armageddon. Even had he not been acquainted with the gossip concerning the strained relations between old Andrew Crothers and his young wife, the room might have enlightened him. But he had heard the talk, in common with the rest of their world. It was curious to reflect that his own presence here was, indirectly, a result of the lack of harmony in the household.

With a slow grin which made of his unusually well-modeled but rather inexpressive features a really delightful comedy mask, Johnny absorbed the internal evidence. Structurally, room remained of the age of Andrew: the heavy architraves and capitals, the massive marble fireplaces, the pseudoclassic arch in the middle with its columns, eloquent of the days of portières and back drawing-rooms; even the two crystal chandeliers, which dangled defiant prisms overhead. But here ancient history and archæology stopped. rest of the room, the brocaded walls, the marvelous Persian rugs on the parqueterie, the French furniture, all but museum pieces, the details of bric-abrac, famille rose and famille verte, all manifested that the tastes of Mrs. Crothers had been turned loose and given a free hand. At least, they had taken a free hand. In a word, the fixtures were the fixtures of old Andrew, but the movables were the movables of his wife. She had not gone so far as she might have done. It was as though she had bargained that, if he removed the family portraits, by nobody in particular, she would refrain from replacing them with modern—but terribly modern—pictures. The brocade panels were undisguised by any frames whatsoever.

"But," Johnny observed to himself,
"I wonder for how long?"

He had an eye, and there was a thrusting, a truculent force about the newer element in this room, scarcely satisfied with an incomplete conquest. Like one of those hungry vines, let into an old garden, it would, in time, be all over it, ruthlessly aggressive, indifferent to the fact that it might destroy what was precious to another. After all, it must have been a shock to an The middle-aged got elderly man. more than fond of their belongings; they got identified with them. knew that from the case of his own mother, who looped her memories over her accustomed interiors until trying to stir her was like dragging an unready butterfly out of its cocoon, whose threads were part of its own body. Johnny's smile went out. neither of them knew it, the expression of worry, which scored two lines between his blond eyebrows, was the inevitable accompaniment of the young man's thoughts when they became occupied with the fragile and exigeant lady who had been responsible for his existence, and who had subsequently made him responsible for hers.

He swung the current of his meditations back to the immediate present. Well, the old man had only himself to thank for it. If he didn't care to experience shocks, what right had he to take unto himself a youthful wife? In the nature of things, he couldn't expect to inject a budding and energetic factor into his faded and tranquil existence, and keep the whole imperturbably unchanged. Johnny, at this point, got up out of the carved and cushioned armchair in which he had settled himself, and took a step forward.

CHAPTER II.

Into the shadowy depths of the long room a woman was entering through the farther door. First impressions are important. His resembled general confusion, and then the conviction that he had done Mrs. Crothers an injustice. He saved himself from apologizing by the happy recollection that she was unconscious of his offense. She was not the aggressive and egotistical personality of which the room trumpeted; not that sort of woman at all. Somebody else had spread the impression there, like a libel; perhaps the old man himself, in his ill-judged efforts to freshen up his old quarters for the bride.

She was a dove, a young gazelle. She was sweet; she was gracious. His errand was going to be less difficult than he had fancied. At the same time, a paradoxical and quite novel species of repugnance entered into it. He hated it with the intimate and unavoidable hate with which a man regards a blemish or deformity in his own person. How was she going to regard him? Well, she had expressed her willingness to give him the interview. Johnson wasn't the man to make a mistake on that point, and he had been very clear about it.

In Johnny's mind arose the human, if not very creditable, effort to feel that, in this particular matter, there was nothing to choose between them, that she was as bad as he was—an effort which faded away and collapsed with his first good look into the girl's face. She was nothing but a girl.

It was not a face of spectacular beauty, not full of the knock-down, violent challenge to admiration which he had anticipated. Indeed, you might hardly have noticed it on the street, unless you were one of those fastidious creatures to whom harmony means more than the obvious appeal. Her hair was brown, a gently waved, close frame for an oval face where the high lights were more ivory and shell pink than snow and roses. But Johnny, who was one of the harmony lovers, knew that he was going to find it hard to keep his eyes from gluttony. There were such well-placed tones around her forehead; such delicious lines about her mouth. She belonged together, and, if she had been an object of art, her maker would have sat back after the final thumb caress and patted himself on the head.

"Good afternoon," she said in a voice that chimed with her face but rose, as it were, on a fresher, more childish note. It was as if a new interest had waked her from a mood of depression and weariness. No wonder, Johnny thought, with a pulse of heat; married to an old What had made her do it? It was easy enough to understand what had led Mr. Crothers to make the venture. She was the type of girl who would seem to him an ideal link between himself and his slackening hold on life; the kind of pensive and sympathetic spring which, in some phases, one can persuade oneself is Indian summer.

As she seated herself he did so, also, and cast about for that one of the numerous ice-breakers which he had prepared, which would seem least unsuitable. She saved him the trouble of selection.

"You wanted to see me?" She was studying him, evidently wondering where she had seen him before; and, though he was sure that this was their first encounter, he knew that he had been obsessed, from the first moment, by the same impression. That was the charm of the girl—it came to him in a flash—to feel that you had known her, long ago, but very well, very deeply. The Babylon sort of thing. Old An-

drew had known what he was about. To be married to her was to have an extraordinary lien on life, past, present, and to come.

He found himself, in exasperation, seizing his credentials, such as they were.

"Mr. Johnson sent me," he began.
"He said that you would be interested——"

"Oh!" Her face lit up with understanding. "Doctor Johnstone is our rector. Is it about the Near East Relief, or the new parish house? I'm afraid I don't know much about the parish affairs, because I haven't been—"

"No," said Johnny shortly. This was intolerable; he had to make his position clear. "No; not at all. On the contrary—Johnson, not Johnstone. He sent me—he told me that you—you might be interested——"

"Yes," prompted the girl, gently encouraging, like a hand held out to a floundering fellow creature.

"Be interested," gulped Johnny, "in ordering some—wine." He turned as bright a red as any vintage on which the best authorities have implored us not to gaze when it is of that particular tincture.

"Oh!" cried the girl.

For a perceptible interval they remained staring at each other. Johnny's brain was fully occupied with speculation as to how she was going to take his revelation. A variety of expressions swept over her face. Was she going to treat the occasion like an ordinary business visit? That would, of course, be the proper thing to do. Or would she be unable to resist injecting a bit of mystery into it, that whiff of the unlawful and the forbidden that so many women of the world find a daring exhilaration in playing with? Or would she laugh? Once she was near it. Or would she, quite simply and politely, turn him out of the house? But then, why allow him to come into it, if she hadn't meant to talk things over and give him an order? Then suddenly a chilling thought broke over him. She had mentioned her rector. might be enthusiastic about that sort of thing. The clerical fight which was raging in the newspapers between different branches of the church was having its logical effect in waking to spiritual ardor any number of women who had never before experienced more than a mild conformity and the conviction that one ought to have a pew in a fashionable church. Everybody likes a good fight. Perhaps Mrs. Crothers was an uplifter; she was out to save the world, and she had sent for him with the express purpose of saving him, of dragging a young man of good connections from the pit edge of the underworld. But how on earth had she found out about him, except in the way of business from Johnson?

In spite of his perturbation, Johnny's mouth contracted in a sort of ingrowing grin, and, to his amazement, the soft and charming mouth of his companion

smiled back.

"This," she informed him, "is most frightfully interesting." She continued to watch him as one does a new specimen which is apparently tame but, on its own confession, belongs to the jungle. "I have heard of them before, of course, but I've never met one."

"Er-what?" floundered Johnny.

"A gentleman bootlegger," responded the girl. Then she sat back, crossed her knees delicately, and folded her hands under her chin, in the attitude of one making herself comfortable for a lengthy chat. "Would you mind," she asked politely, "telling me something about it?"

"What-would you like to hear?" he

inquired helplessly.

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"Almost anything ought to be worth while." The lovely eyes grew meditative, the artist look, the withdrawal of

composition. "You see, I write; that is, I'm beginning to write. I've had things taken by good magazines. Now, I believe in treating the life about you, the tendencies and conditions of the world as it is just now. The gentleman highwayman used to be a highly successful hero in novels, you know. It cheered up as soon as he came on. So it seems to me that the gentleman bootlegger ought to have for the public a similar attraction. The Beau Brocade of the motor car, the Jack Sheppard of the rum fleet. By the way, would you have anything to do with that?"

"Nothing whatever," Johnny responded shortly. The conversation had taken a turn that had no real connection with his errand here. He simply had to wait until it curved back again. "I'm afraid that any information I could give you would be very commonplace and have no value as literature, practically. Romantic pirating isn't in my line. I don't run any danger. I'm not even one of the gang you read about that dash through the night and fight revenue officials." A bitterness came into his voice. "To put it politely, I take my directions from a distributing agent, and I'm to take orders, quite confidentially and nicely, from our best people." Then, exactly as though he had known this strange young woman all his life, he blurted out: "I suppose you think it isn't much of a job.'

She dropped her clasped hands on her knees and leaned forward over them.

"The worst is," she answered softly, accepting instantly the reality of his tone, "that you really do seem to be a gentleman."

"When I was at college," Johnny answered with irony, "'What is a gentleman?' was one of the favorite topics for informal discussion. I don't know that the question was ever satisfactorily answered. Being a gentleman, however, as Johnson told me frankly, is my best asset." A smile, distinctly unpleasant,

lifted his lip. "If you're on the lookout for types, I'm sure you'd like Johnson. Remember, he hasn't the least intention, or even any consciousness, of being cynical. Just beautifully simple. He expects me to make myself worth while through my social connections."

"Oh-h!" breathed the girl.

Under the compassion of her eyes she was understanding it; she actually was—the young man felt the dull revolt, that had been seething in his mind ever since he had undertaken to do this thing, burst through the crust and become articulate.

"Pleasant, isn't it?" he said. "You're to sell stuff to your friends and acquaintances, because they can take your word for it that it's decent stuff, not poison, and because you can arrange to deliver it inside their houses without rousing the suspicions that a professional bootlegger would arouse. Clubs, They're willing to pay well for a reliable link with the base of supplies. Also, friends of your friends, when well recommended-on both sides." self-disgust in his own voice silenced It sounded indecent. What on earth was he telling her this for? "I suppose," he said apologetically, "you think it awfully queer, my saying these things."

She shook her head.

"No, people tell me things all the time. They sit by me on trains, or in public libraries, and pour out the stories of their lives. It's a gift, I guess."

"You must find it useful in your

work."

"It ought to be, except that editors generally consider the slices of life thoroughly unnatural. But I've stopped being surprised by anything. It's a remarkable world we live in."

To this profoundly original remark Johnny returned no answer. He was being visited by the incongruous feeling that he ought to be sitting out in the open air with this girl, on the bank of a stream, under the awning of tolerant trees. Then the conversation would have been not so much explicable as inevitable. Her next speech intensified the vision.

"You hate it, don't you—this work?"
"Heavens, yes!" said Johnny.

"Then why do you do it?"

"I have to live. Besides, there's another person dependent, at least partly, on me."

As she leaned forward a little more a suspense hung in the air, as though the birds in those arching dream trees had fallen silent, waiting for a predatory shadow to pass or settle down.

"You are-married?"

"No; but—my mother's an invalid."
"Ah, yes," said the girl gently. He

"Ah, yes," said the girl gently. He understood then that, whoever might tell her the story of their lives, he was not going to. It was better that she should keep looking with that compassion at some fancy picture of a heroically patient and attractive sufferer. If ever Mr. Crothers lost his tough hold on life, and took to a push chair and a diet, she would be an angel to him. She would be sweet to all invalids.

"But"—she pursued her questions that he had no thought of resenting—
"couldn't you make a living some other

way?"

That made his smile unpleasant again. "Don't you suppose that I've tried? This is the last resort. I've sold bonds. I've written stuff for newspapers. I've done endless things. The real trouble is that I wasn't trained for any profession in particular."

"No?" She had a way of putting into her monosyllabic questions endless temptations to a fellow to go on con-

fiding.

"I think I should have gone into my father's office, if he had lived," the young man went on. "He was an architect and a good one. But while I was at college he died. There didn't seem any particular necessity for hurry—

there appeared to be plenty of money until—well, I had to settle down rather suddenly and make a living for myself and my mother."

"But the money?"

"That had been a mistake." There was no use in telling that tale of a woman's woeful incompetence and extravagance. "In the meantime, the years that ought to have gone into preparation were gone—without it."

"But wasn't there any one else who could have taken care of your mother and left you free to study some profes-

sion-any relative?"

Johnny gave a laugh like a slight

snort.

"She had one rich relative. He had quarreled with her years before. Do you remember a bravo in one of Victor Hugo's plays who assassinated for a living? When he was asked why he'd chosen such a horrible trade he answered that his children were hungry, and, anyway, it was more honorable than begging. Well, what I'm doing now is more honorable than begging from that particular old man—at least, that's the way I feel about it."

"Have you been doing it long?"

asked the girl.

The truth came out of him.

"This is my first attempt. I started to-day."

CHAPTER III.

There was a brief silence. The girl sat, looking past him, as though studying some condition, some background, that would account for him.

"It seems to me," she said at last, "so many of us start with the best motives, the really—most noble motives. And then we watch them go down under the force of circumstances. Life's too strong."

How she understood! Had it been that way with her? Then, how had she managed to keep her clear eyes, the peculiarly untouched and virginal quality—yes, it was that—he felt in her? The feeling that she had no right to it stung him into his flippant answer.

"Life is just one compromise after another," he said lightly. "You go a little farther, and a little farther, until some day you find yourself right over the fatal line—where I am."

Her head went up. He was to learn her capacity for changes of mood, but the flash of challenge with which she met his conclusion startled him.

"No," she said hotly, "that's exactly

where you're not."

"Thanks to you," Johnny responded coolly. "You haven't given me an order yet, so, technically, I suppose that I'm innocent. But I'm ready to join the criminal class as soon as you give the word."

"You never will," she declared with fervor. "It isn't in you. Facts are stubborn things, you know. The fact is that you haven't done anything wrong yet. You can still stop—and you're going to stop right here." She put her hands out an inch, and said under her breath: "I wonder what I can do!" quite as though he were a stray puppy which had thrust itself upon her responsibility. Johnny saw why strangers imposed their confidences on her; she adopted their troubles.

"Kindly tell me one thing," he asked. It was delightful to be cherished like this, but business, discordant as it might be to the finer emotions, remained business. "Did you send for me to pluck me as a brand from the burning, or not? I suspected it a while back."

"I?" She frowned. "I send for you? I never did. I never even heard of you before." She dimpled through her surprise. "You are an extraordinary person. Life once had a joke about the best part of your profession being the people you meet. Really, I think the advantages are by no means on one side. I've found all this most interesting."

Johnny found himself on his feet.

"I'm sorry. I seem to have made a mistake.'

"You might have made a bad one." She was looking at him, surprisingly enough, almost with admiration. "You said you didn't do the dangerous things, but don't you realize the risks you run in popping into a strange house and giving yourself away, like this? Suppose I were one of those fanatics who would consider it their duty to sneak to the telephone and inform the police?"

Johnny smiled.

"You see," he explained painstakingly, "I was told that Mrs. Crothers

was willing to see me."

"Oh-Mrs. Crothers!" cried the girl. "I understand." In her turn, she flushed. "Oh, I'm sure there was a mistake," she went on hurriedly. "She couldn't have. What made you think so ?"

"You are not Mrs. Crothers?" demanded Johnny. At the moment that

seemed the important point.

"No; my name is Janet Crothers; Mr. Andrew Crothers is my cousin. I am only visiting here. I see how it happened. Sanders, the butler, is growing deaf, and won't admit it for the world. He mistook. He's one of the things Mrs. Crothers wants to change." She checked herself.

"And I, possibly, am connected with another," Johnny hazarded. He tried to inject into his tone a feeling that would neutralize the seeming impertinence of the words. He had to justify his presence here to the girl, if it could be justified.

She decided to keep putting up with him on that broad basis of common humanity which had animated their un-

usual interview.

"If she sent for you," she returned with dignity. "Cousin Andrew, you know, is one of those eccentric rich men who believe in obeying the law. won't allow any wine even in the house. And Olive has complained that you can't

get people to have a good time without it; her parties fell flat. Awful arraignment of human brains, isn't it? But this-"

Johnny did not insist. He knew that she had accepted the proof that young Mrs. Crothers had succumbed to the temptation of making her parties go, even if old Andrew had to be deceived into becoming a successful host.

"Good-by," said Johnny reluctantly.

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"I'm sorry-

"Wait," ordered the girl. She was looking past him again, but with a curiously plain intimation that now she was considering the immediate future. "What are you going to do? Go onwith this?"

For the first time resentment stirred in him. What did she know of the pressing and crushing needs of a man's life? He did, not what he wanted, but what the opportunities of civilization suffered him to do.

"Though the necessity has been questioned before," he answered stiffly, "I am still of the opinion that one must

live."

"Wait a minute." She went to the delightful buhl writing table, took a card from what looked like a mammoth enameled snuffbox, and scribbled on it. "Here! Take this to Major Roderick Laurel, at the address I've written, and he'll get you a jo-a position,"

The expedition of the proceeding took

his breath away.

"Don't look like that!" she besought him. "He isn't a welfare station. He's the most cynical man I know; he expects nothing from human nature-and is always willing to pick up the pieces. He'll get you something to do, and it won't be an absolutely wrong fit, either." The laugh went out of her voice as she ended: "Please, please, go to him!"

"But," Johnny objected, turning the card over uneasily, "why should he be bothered with me? It seems an imposi-

A suspicion drew Janet Crothers' brows together.

"Is there any reason—I don't know about, why you shouldn't go to him?"

"You mean, is there any further depth? No, you know the worst of me, I fancy."

Her face cleared.

"Then he'll be glad to do it."

"Why, in Heaven's name?" Johnny asked, his eyes glinting. If she knew the possible reasons Roderick Laurel might have, really, on either side of the subject—she couldn't know. In fact, he had never learned what Major Laurel's attitude had been, at the time.

"Because," said Janet deliberately, "I ask him."

"Oh!" said the other blankly. At his tone she blushed again. "He is my cousin, too. He is Mr. Crothers' nephew." Her confusion implied that it was no business of his what else he might be.

It has become a truism to call attention to the younger generation's impatience with formality, and its tendency to become intimate on the slightest provocation; but when the girl's voice sank to an intense whisper, as if his compliance were of vast importance to her, Johnny knew that a succession of walls had gone down between them. She even laid a tight little hand on his arm.

"Don't tell her—please don't tell her what you came for!" her warm voice besought. "Don't go on with it any farther."

There was the susurrous whisper of a woman's passage through the hall. It was as faint as the sound of palms under the south wind, and it came with some implication of the magic for which palms stand—mysteriously straining after what they have not, and never can have. That is the note of palms—at least, in their native habitat—and it is for some remnant of that yearning that people buy them after they have been coldly trans-

planted into pots and shipped to northern latitudes. And this was, in some sense, the note of the woman who entered the room.

Johnny Betterton understood now why his first glimpse of Janet had not fitted in with what he had heard of the beautiful Mrs. Crothers. The newcomer more nearly filled the measure of that abused adjective than many women who preëmpt it. As she came through the doorway he had the impression of a picture leaving its frame, and moving with that liquid and effortless motion which pictures, did they move at all, would certainly use. Her walk had the grace of a lapsing wave, a flow that made the cloudy blue of her dress seem the inevitable color for her. She was of the white-skinned brunette type that exercised over him an attraction which, possibly, had its roots in a profound natural law; he himself being of the blond, clearly blocked-out Nordic kind.

He had passed through a good deal of mental disturbance that day, but his dominant feeling was cumulative; it resembled that of an explorer who has stumbled on the perfect specimen which he had hardly supposed to exist. When he glanced at Janet she seemed to have faded, gone out, as a delicate half-tone fades under the impact of a clear, Oriental scarlet. It was a half-tone which had sunk into his consciousness deeper, perhaps, than he knew; it had reminded him of reposeful, outdoor things, flowing water, and dear, protective branches. But in the presence of this woman he stopped thinking altogether. She embodied his idea of what a woman ought to look like. She called out the approval of his artistic sense, and, unmistakably, that vital affirmation of interest which renders a man blind and deaf, for the time, to any other call of life.

"Don't tell her what you came for!" Janet might have spared herself the trouble of beseeching him. Not for the world would he tell her! At least, she shouldn't begin by despising him. He heard Janet presenting him, ostensibly as one of her friends—he realized that they were quite old friends by this time—and he played up gallantly.

He had been taking his leave, and he did not dare to linger, in spite of an impulse that seemed to be pulling against his wish to go in an even realler desire to stay. When he found himself on the sidewalk his world was in rather a more chaotic condition than it had been when he had mounted those steps earlier in the afternoon. He had had a momentous day. He had embarked on a new vocation, and had quit it, and was on his way to undertake another, nature unknown. He had met two charming women. He had fallen in love-if this was love, and, according to the best models, it must be-with the wrong one. Most wonderful of all, she had given him a long look which had gone completely to his head, and had asked him -of course, as a friend of Janet's-to come again.

CHAPTER IV.

It is the fashion, in the most superior kind of fiction written to-day, to decry the influence of women. The idea of the eternal feminine, which leads us upward and on, is an exploded superstition. One of the earliest protests was made by the irrepressible Bernard Shaw, when he allowed his Devil's Disciple to declare that he did the right and heroic thing at the crucial moment, not because of the ennobling influence of Judith's love, but because he absolutely couldn't bear the notion of letting another man put his head in the halter in his place. It was common, intrinsic masculine decency that prompted him, that's all. The lesson is that men arrange their own destinies.

But, where the damaging influence of women is concerned, as Major Roderick Laurel said, any man can produce extenuating circumstances for his mistakes.

The life of Johnny Betterton, at least, had been directed by women since his birth, probably sooner. There was, first of all, his mother. It is not pleasant to admit that the initial shove down the easy slope of Avernus was administered to a man's pram by the hand of his mother. She had spoiled him until he got in her way, and then she had promptly got him out of it by sending him to school, or camp, or on a nice long visit to a friend. Of course, she did not appear to Johnny as a bundle of characteristics, of which egotism and flightiness were the most salient; she was simply "mother," and he adored her as a small boy would adore a pretty, indulgent woman.

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It was only when he had come to take stock of the remnants of his father's estate, that the truth percolated through his filial piety. She had ruthlessly sacrificed his future to her tastes. She had shown not only incompetence, but what the law would have called by a harsher name, and she was so far from comprehending her own conduct that she still considered that it was his duty to provide her with the luxuries she wanted. She had lately added to these an expensive sanitarium habit.

Such is the force of habit and of the filial instinct, that Johnny capitulated. There was a small life income, whose principal she could not touch, but, for the rest, it was up to him. With a curious reversal of their natural relations, he came to feel that not to be nice to her would be like turning a helpless child adrift in a cold world.

So Johnny had gone to work, animated by precisely those admirable intentions to which Janet Crothers had referred, to find that the pressure of circumstances was gradually pushing him down the slope and into the desert.

There are, by the way, three sorts of

desert. Into the first, over which arch the wide spaces, the American hero goes to be saved and regenerated. Into the second the heroines go to be lost, and to encounter romance clad in burnooses. The third is the common great American desert. We have seen how Johnny came to be involved with those who traffic therein, and how he abandoned the trail actually before he had struck it. In this crisis—Shaw to the contrary—he was directly guided, not to say coerced, by the influence of a woman.

Logically, he ought to have fallen in love with Janet Crothers. There had been set up between them more than enough of the necessary vibration of youth and mutual appreciation. Nature, always on the watch for such meetings, had begun sending the messages along the wireless tracks of emotion. And then they had been inhibited by a habit of Johnny's mind which had become a subconscious rule to him. He didn't have to remind himself any longer that he mustn't become interested in any girl; this habit arranged it for him.

Owing to his mother, he could not think of marriage. That is, unless he married a rich girl, who would be, as he knew, enthusiastically welcomed into the family circle. Being unusually attractive, Johnny would have found little difficulty in making what our forefathers unblushingly called a good match, but this was a step to which he simply could not make up his mind. He had known men who had gone systematically into society and become one of the creatures whom Lord Byron described as animals dancing for their living-though Byron had meant only young ladies of the best ton-and the sliminess of these men had disgusted him.

Money wouldn't keep him away from a girl. He had none of the old-fashioned tradition, that used to pervade literature and probably nowhere else, that a man ought to provide all the sinews of the domestic campaign. A

rich girl, given her opportunities of travel, becoming clothes, and accomplishments, had as much chance, certainly, of being attractive as a poor one. But the idea of marrying, not for the girl but for her belongings, repelled him; to marry a girl without worldly goods was impossible; and, by a sad fatality, every girl, who had seriously troubled him, had been impecunious. Therefore, he had learned, whenever a pair of sympathetic eyes like Janet's had set him dreaming, to make a definite act of the will and put them outside of his fancy. This can be done, if one does it early and with firmness, though these first impressions sometimes have a worrying way of coming back, like an intermittent fever.

Being human, Johnny had discovered, after a few of these unhappy experiences, the value of a counterirritant. An interest in several women at once helps. For years Johnny had borne, perhaps not altogether without reproach—for women can be unaccountably unreasonable—the grand old name of philanderer. A good many women had touched, more or less appropriatively, various sides of his character. Though none of them had made indelible marks, they had all contributed to his sentimental education.

This, briefly, will explain the suddenness with which his very real interest in Janet had been diverted. Logically, he ought to have loved her. That he did not surrender proves how many barriers civilization has set in the path of natural selection. And the consequence of this inhibition of the intention of nature was that it left him open to other and more destructive powers. The influence of a third woman undertook to direct his affairs.

However, that wasn't as simple as it seems, either.

As he walked down the street he found himself living over, not the rather long interval which he had passed in the Crother's house, but one single moment of it. He reconstructed, not the sufficiently striking interview which had taken place, but one sensation which, for the joy and the exhilaration of it, he was trying to hold onto, to keep the thrill that it had sent along his nerves. She had looked into his eyes—that tall, picture creature who walked like Undine, and whose look was like nothing else on earth. She had asked him, in a few conventional words, to come to her house again, but her gaze had said, more unmistakably than words: "What am I to you? What will you be to me?"

CHAPTER V.

Sanders, the butler, passing through the hall, cocked his better ear and paused tentatively, ready to resume his way if a door opened. Deafness was a great deprivation, especially lately when a good deal was going on in the family which would pay observation. The governor and the missus were having words again. If there was one thing Sanders admired in the upper classes, it was their ability to have words without raising their natural voices, but this time they were evidently so much in earnest, that they were ignoring the first law of civilized society: "Thou shalt not let the servants overhear.'

Mr. Crothers' voice, edged, rose on that falsetto note which lies in wait for age under excitement, the note that gives a woman the excuse for treating a man as though he were not quite on equal terms, as though he were ill and had to be humored.

"I wonder why I married you," he said.

Sanders twitched with impatience. One of the maids was going toward the dining room, where she had no business. He mustn't be caught listening. He followed her, trying to get some consolation out of the exercise of his authority. Women were a nuisance, high or low;

he agreed thoroughly with his employer that marriage was a problem.

Mr. Crothers, behind the closed door of the drawing-room, waited for the smooth, contemptuous answer to his provocative speech. He had not intended to make it; it had slipped out under the pressure of a bad habit which was growing on him—the habit of not sufficiently discriminating between his thoughts and his utterances. It was a sign of age, grown stronger since his marriage. Or had he only begun to notice it since then?

"I suppose you married me for the same reason that a good many other men wanted to," she responded, not acidly but with a more wounding indifference. "I'm not old or ugly enough—yet—to make a man hunt for a reason."

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Her peculiar emphasis on the word made him snap out:

"What do you mean by-yet?"

"If I lead this life much longer," she answered, looking not at him but beyond, through the clear, spider-web panel of the window, "I shall be old and ugly."

The cruelty of it made it momentous. So that was how she felt about it. He was too overwhelmed to answer. The meaning of this inadequacy, this sense of inferiority, which he felt when they were together, was being cleared up. He had cherished no illusions about her possible love for him; that was too much to expect; but he had supposed that she liked him, found his company as agreeable as he could make it to other women. and to men. He was rather a popular person, in request for dinners and weekends, and that sort of thing. Why, the way she stared past him made him feel unclean. Her perfect clarity of eye and complexion, her resilient, live-colored black hair, that freshness of young things-not only of the grooming that made his valet's life a burden, but the cleanness of youth that went all through -that wasn't his any longer. Did she find him repulsive? Couldn't she stand him, after all?

"Er-what don't you like about it?" he asked, with difficulty.

Her hand made a vague gesture that included everything. He knew that she was passing over the more important elements in her discontent when she spoke.

"Take this house! You don't let me touch it, except superficially. Even the servants are antediluvian. Sanders is getting to be impossible, and I always feel that he's watching me to see that I don't change anything. And Scrymgeor—heavens, what a name! It sounds exactly like a chauffeur who lets the brakes grind. He hasn't the faintest idea of looking smart."

Mr. Crothers' thin, high-nosed face settled into the petrified decision which the various boards on which he sat knew and wilted under; he passed his hand over his gray but still abundant hair, a trick of his, indicating that the mind under the hair was made up, once for all.

"Scrymgeor is necessary to me," he closed the subject. "I've had him for ten years. He's an unusually careful driver."

"If I could have a car, I could drive myself," murmured Olive.

That was the way, he realized, in which their spats had invariably ended, in his conceding new privileges. Last month he would have yielded, but now he intended to be obdurate. It wasn't the money he grudged. It was characteristic of one part of Mr. Crothers' mind, though not of all parts, that it flew to the sum total which it had already cost him to place this disturbing creature in his house, to show her to his world as a living proof of his importance and his power to obtain what he wanted. He had strung her with jewels, and made changes in his mode of living which would cost him in a few years the cost of many diamonds.

He had not grudged the money. But

she should not have the small car she wanted, that she could drive. meant an accession of liberty which he was desperately determined to deny her. Who knew where a woman might go, how far, how long, with a car at her absolute disposal? That sort of car was the modern woman's real charter of freedom. Before this, she had pointed out the fact that one chauffeur between them was an absurdity, quite incommensurate with the way in which they lived. This time he meant to fight. He had put up with a great deal. He had even acquiesced in the understanding that you couldn't be a successful hostess without having a lot of tame cats about the house. But her own car-no, that was allowing her rather too much of a free hand.

Mr. Crothers started, shaken out of his concentration. Like a diabolical epitome of his thoughts, with infernal appositeness, a young man had come into the room.

"How-d'ye-do?" said Johnny Betterton pleasantly, with the indefinable air of having been here often before, an air which Mrs. Crothers' own manner confirmed, though in another key.

As the newcomer greeted Olive, her husband took in the tableau sardonically. Yes, they were behaving very well. Any one seeing them might suppose that there was nothing in it beyond the natural friendliness of two attractive young people. Young—that was it!

"What's the weather like?" he inquired abruptly.

"Fine!" Johnny gave him his best attention instantly. Your well-trained tame cat is particularly considerate of the husband. "Spring coming with a rush."

"I rather thought I'd run down to my place on the Hudson and see how the garden is getting on. Can't trust my man; he's likely to transplant too early and get things nipped. I'll be back this evening." "You're interested in gardening?"

Johnny inquired politely.

"The place is his hobby," Olive said indolently. "He'll enjoy showing it to you; he loves to get a fresh eye on it. You must come later, when we go there. I don't know why it's called Xanadu. Why did you call it that, Andrew? It's not in the least Oriental, and it hasn't even got a dome."

"Liked the name," replied her husband shortly. "Well, if I'm going, I'd better start." He nodded and went, with the vigorous step that seemed intentional, out of the room. He was a tallish, spare type, and his squared shoulders also conveyed the impression that they would have sagged, left to their natural inclination.

The change in the atmosphere was like the shifting of a scene. Neither spoke, but the woman put her head back and closed her eyes. As he stood behind the sofa on which she sat Johnny could look down on the tight lines of her lids and the underlip caught in her teeth.

"What's the matter, Olive?" he asked gently. He had made up his mind not to touch her, but she put her hand up, feeling for his along the sofa's rim, and he had no choice but to take it. "What do you want?" he went on. "You look ill." He hated to see her suffer; being naturally tender-hearted, he hated to see anything suffer.

"Music," she answered in a whisper.
"Only music, I think. Something to
make me friends with—all this, and with
myself. I'm not friends with anything
in the world; it's all awry, all unnatural
—except you." She drew his fingers
closer and rubbed them slowly over her
cheek. "Music—no, this will do as well.
Don't move, don't say anything; just be
quiet and let me feel you're there——"
Her voice trailed off; he could see the
tormented lines of her face relax, the
sweetness slip back into them again.
His hand made an involuntary retreat-

ing movement. Frowning, he glanced about the room, and Olive, suddenly opening her lids, caught the look.

"What are you searching for?" she wondered. Then a sharp resentment brought a spark into her swimming gaze. "Janet!" she said harshly. "You're looking for Janet. Will you tell me, please, which of us you come for, anyway? It was very convenient to let them suppose she was the attraction, but you do it almost too well. She's not here any longer. She's gone to live in a studio apartment house with a thousand other little writers and artists. You'll get a card from her today, no doubt."

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"She's gone?" Johnny repeated rather

He had been missing Janet. Since their first meeting he had been seeing a good deal of her, and he knew that she contemplated this move, but its actuality took him by surprise. The feeling he had for Janet did not fit into any of his categories. He was immensely grateful to her, for having been as good a friend to him as a man could have been, but, more than that, he had found her a source of great rest and refreshment. When he had been torn to pieces by Olive's personality, her unaccountable changes and vagaries, it had been a comfort to turn to the girl. There was about her a clearer air and a more delicate touch; and she was cleverer than Olive. You didn't have to be on your guard against half-suspected rapacities and egotisms that left you, you didn't know where. You could be yourself with Janet, instead of that complicated yourself-in-relation-to-her

that Olive demanded.

Sometimes he thought of Olive as the eternal flirt, promising much but giving very little; sometimes he wasn't sure that she didn't have the makings of the most tragic passions. The chief reason why he had not been altogether conquered by her, why his taste, or his

pride, or some reluctant scruple, had held him back, was because a strong, steady influence, emanating from Janet, had got its bridle round his throat.

And yet she never gave him the exaltation, the ferment, that he understood by the word love. Rapture was a quality one didn't associate with little

In seasons of self-analysis, which, to do him justice, seldom occurred, Johnny had wondered whether the perfect cad is not the man who is half gone on two women, and is unable to plunge over the emotional edge with either. He had begun with an idealistic devotion, doomed, of course, to be hopeless, to the poised and complete picture woman of his first meeting; only to find, almost at once, that she was not poised, not complete in herself, in the least. She was restless; she was full of discontent and passionate curiosity. She attracted and repelled, and her treatment of him often cut deep at the roots of his self-respect.

"I wonder if you like me at all," she said with a laugh that was none the less wild because it was under her breath.

The irony stung him, implying that he was shallow, a laggard in love.

"You know that I'm devoted to you," he returned. He bent down but she avoided him, though she smiled up into his face.

"Are you, are you, Johnny?" She was all sweetness again, as though his avowal had been her real object, "Go and play to me. Like most of your accomplishments, your playing isn't good enough to be of any practical use, but there's a certain charm about it. It's good enough to make me dream, anyway. The only people who get much out of this world are those who stay inside their dreams as much as possible."

Sunk in the corner of her sofa, she let the slow, melting harmonies submerge her, mount like a tide, higher and higher into her heart. Later, Johnny remembered that he had heard her moan

once or twice, and once, when the strains became too much like a whisper of unhappy confessions, she had called to him sharply, "not to remind her, but

to make her forget."

After Johnny had gone she remained sunk in the mood that his last melody had evoked, the mood of a girl in the first, gradual springtime of love which she had missed-a girl who searcely cares to hurry its summer. When the door opened again she half lifted her arm, as if the fitting culmination of her reverie would be the embrace which she had not yet-she hardly knew whyallowed him to take.

Her husband stood in the doorway. Olive's hand curved to the back of her head and indolently patted her hair.

"Haven't you gone yet?" she asked. "You won't have time to get back, starting as late as this."

"I was delayed. I'll spend the night there." He lingered. "Hasn't Roderick given that young man a job at his office?"

"I believe so."

"He has a genius for putting round pegs into square holes. What possible use can he have for that cub?"

"It's no more eccentric that the rest of Roderick," his wife informed him coolly. "Or, at least, than his conversation.'

Mr. Crothers gave a peculiar chuckle. "You'd better be careful what you say about Roderick. He's my nearest relation. One of these days it may be in his power to be very helpful to youor the reverse."

"In what way?" asked Olive lan-

He grinned at the change in her manner when he retorted:

"As executor of my will." With that heavy and rather ill-natured raillery, which she found one of the most unbearable of his traits, he went on: "Would you like to know the details?"

"I have no doubt everything has been

arranged so as to give me the greatest trouble and inconvenience."

"See here, Olive, that isn't fair!"
The amusement dropped dead from Mr.
Crothers' manner. "When have I treated you badly?"

Her mood laid hold on the first grievance she could recall.

"When we came from Europe you insisted upon declaring all my clothes—"

"Naturally; I obey the law."

"And you made me pay for mine out

"And you made me pay for mine ou of my allowance."

"But, good heavens," shouted Mr. Crothers, exasperated, "we had decided that your allowance should cover all your personal expenses. You said that you preferred it that way. You don't suppose I minded the money, do you?"

"How do I know what you mind?" his wife asked in weary accents, her lids drooping again. "You're always complaining of my extravagance."

"Always?"

"You did last week."

"Who wouldn't have? Always! I like that. I can tell you one thing I do mind, though. I mind these young cubs walking in and making me feel in the way, in my own house. I mind that. Kindly remember that you're my wife." He had struck the real bedrock of the quarrel, and she flashed back at him her recognition of the fact. The talk about money had meant little to either of them, though it might have furnished the cause for the first speck in the garnered fruit of their marriage. Fruit like theirs had to be handled delicately not to speck.

She cried out at him:

"Do you think you ever let me forget it?"

The counterquestion, "Do you want to forget it?" was on his lips, but he forced it back. He literally did not dare to utter it; her answer might end too much.

"You certainly know how to make home pleasant," he observed. "I shall be glad to go to Xanadu. I may stay

a day or longer. If so, I'll send back the car."

His self-control maddened her.

"Oh," she cried poignantly, "I hope you'll stay a long time—a long time!"

Mr. Crothers Without replying, turned his back. The light chair on which he had been leaning slipped from his hand and clattered to the floor. He left it there and went out into the hall so suddenly that Sanders had barely time to duck behind an angle of the staircase. From it he assumed a dignified entrance which gave him the excuse to open the front door for his master. Mr. Crothers—as Sanders subsequently testified-passed him without appearing to see him, walking with slow step and sagging figure, like a man under the stress of some absorbing and bitter mood. Still moving in this automatic manner, he descended the steps and approached the waiting car. Scrymgeor, the chauffeur, opened the door for him and drove away. It was the first time that Sanders had ever seen his employer seated in his car without presenting any resemblance to a well-dressed and rather distinguished ramrod.

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And in this manner Mr. Crothers went out of his house, out of his circle, and, to all intents and purposes, out of the world where he had lived and moved and had his being.

The next day brought back neither Mr. Crothers nor the car. Telephone communication with the caretakers at Xanadu disclosed the fact that he had not reached that place.

Mr. Crothers had disappeared.

CHAPTER VI.

Major Roderick Laurel was having busy and eventful days. A man of Mr. Andrew Crothers' importance does not vanish without leaving a hole in the world, comparable to the hole made in the atmosphere into which winds immediately rush, producing storms. The

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world in general had unanimously elected Major Laurel, the nephew of the missing man, as the individual to whom it was proper to report, and of whom it was natural to demand information, whether he himself had it or not. His offices had become happy hunting in a low tone of entreaty: grounds for reporters, especially while interviews with police commissioners and other great persons were going on in his private room. He had never received so many invitations, and his mail kept two secretaries busy from morning to night.

Ever since the day Olive had sent for him, a white-faced, panic-stricken Olive, and practically put her troubles into his hands, Major Laurel had done his best to shield her. Some interviews she was obliged to undergo, but where he could act for her, he did so. When one considers that he had never liked Olive, had disapproved of his uncle's marriage, and took a pessimistic view of its probable outcome, his behavior must be accounted to him for righteousness. He had a strong sense of family obligation, and he was, pro tem, as it were, the head of the family, until his uncle was found; but, besides this, it was entirely in his character to take charge and do the best he could with a situation in which he had no confidence. That was his way of regarding existence as a whole.

If Roderick Laurel had been a tall and handsome man, he might have been insufferably pompous. As it was, he just escaped ugliness, and he was obliged to make the most of his inches to avoid insignificance. He had made a good deal of money in real estate, and he had achieved a reputation for telling a good story, but the most precious thing that had ever come his way was his military title, won during the war. Nothing in the world would have induced him to part with it. It gave him the sense of dignity which he had always felt lacking in his personality.

All the communications which were thrust upon him were not official. It was several days after the disappearance that he entered the door of the Crothers' house, and heard Sanders, actually before he had taken the visitor's hat, say

"If you please, sir---

The major turned sharply on him.

"What's it, Sanders? For some days you've been trying to get it out. Don't let the worm feed on your damask cheek; I dislike worms. Out with it!" "If it didn't seem to be my duty, sir,

I wouldn't say a word."

"Well, say the word." "The afternoon before he went out, sir-and never have I seen him look so down spirited as he looked then-they had a quarrel, sir, a violent quarrel."

"Go on."

Understanding that his narrative had right of way, Sanders lost his furtive manner of apology and took heart.

"For some time, sir, we'd been noticing all was not as it should be. That very day I had mentioned to the cook that it called for remark. 'It's hard enough,' I said, 'for an old gentleman and a young lady to put up with each other, in the best of circumstances."

"I see," said the major meditatively. "The difficult thing is not the original investment in matrimonial affection; it's

the upkeep."

"Precisely, sir." Sanders came closer and sank his voice to a thrilling hiss. "There's no doubt in my mind, sir, that he threatened her. Passing through the hall, I couldn't help hearing. He told her, Mr. Crothers did, that he was going away, and she told him she hoped she'd never see him again, or words to that effect. And then-I hate to say it of a gentleman that's always been quite the gentleman-but he knocked her down!"

"Impossible," observed Major Laurel. "You may well say so, sir. But, unless you've lived in as many of the best families as I have, you don't understand what may, and often does, happen there. I heard the sound, sir, as she fell to the floor. After he left I made an occasion to go into the drawingroom, to light up, and she'd been crying, sir, I'd take my Bible oath to that."

"On the floor?"

"No, sir, she'd picked herself up by that time. But she was upset, sir. And more than that"—Sanders glanced over his shoulder, and his tone hissed again—"she looked—dangerous, sir! She scared me. I wouldn't have had anybody feel about me that way for a million dollars."

The two men looked each other in the eye. Then Major Laurel very deliberately folded his hands on the top of his cane, as though about to make a speech

-and made it.

"I know that it is the fashion now-adays, Sanders, to take for granted that a man's foes are those of his own house-hold. You need say no more; I understand you. I believe that the other day the police even seized a pistol made out of glass, indicating that some genius has invented a new cut-glass article for use as a wedding present. But it strikes me that it is taking an extreme liberty—you may not agree with me, perhaps—to accuse a respectable lady of the murder of her husband."

"Me, sir?" ejaculated the butler,

aghast. "I never-"

"Yes, you were, Sanders. That is precisely what you were working up to." The major continued in his even, unstayable flow of language: "As you indicate, it is a natural supposition that a man's nearest and dearest have the best right to desire his removal, because they are undoubtedly, with frequent exasperation, acquainted with his worst manners and his most trying aspects. Therefore, cases have been known where loving couples have been put asunder, not by the act of God, but the act of one of them, who managed to live happy ever after. But I should

be exceedingly sure of my proofs before I accused a lady of such an impersonation of Providence. It is a very heinous offense.

"You are a Britisher, I believe. Are you aware that, not much more than a century ago, your humane countrymen called the murder of a husband petit treason, and punished it accordingly? If you will excuse the gruesome details, they strangled the woman and then burned her. If I were you, Sanders, I should not mention this imaginative . story of yours to any one else. hearing, as I have noticed, is not acute; moreover, eavesdropping is apt to produce a hurry and confusion of mind during which mistakes are easily made." The major walked toward the drawingroom as though he had said all he had to say, but, as he opened the door, he turned to clinch his effect. "Slander and defamation of character are also serious offenses, and the law has provided adequate and rather unpleasant consequences for indulging in them."

He waited until Sanders had slunk away, then he said half-aloud, a habit of his when he was very much put out:

"There, I think that will shut his mouth." As he went into the room he gave a start. "Olive! How stupid of me. I hope you didn't hear."

She gave him her hand and clung to his a little, in the way that always dis-

armed him.

"I heard enough to understand. What must strangers be saying about me when my own servants—""

"The man's a pernicious fool," ex-

ploded Roderick.

"And I can't dismiss him, for fear of his talk. That settles it. I'll take your advice, Roderick, and go to Xanadu; that will give me the excuse of leaving him here to take care of the house. It would be intolerable to have him around. Of course, the first question asked is, whoever has most to gain by a man's death."

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Roderick nerved himself to his invariable task of raising Olive from the depths and waking her mind up to something more than its listless brooding.

"In the first place, the man isn't dead, so far as we know. In the second, you don't have most to gain."

"What?"

"Do you know the contents of his will—the recent one? I considered it my duty to protest, but without avail. Judging by that, I'm the suspect."

"You?"

"Yes! As nearest of kin, I am made his heir, practically. You are provided for handsomely, but you won't be sensationally rich, by any means. You'll be able to keep this house—with economy."

"I see," said Olive in a suffocated voice. "It isn't the money, Roderick, but—oh, it's insulting to be treated like that. As though he had said: 'She married me for a home; well, I'll give

her a home."

For once Roderick found it impossible to tell the truth. When he had objected to the terms of the will old Andrew had shut him up with the curt words, "She'll marry again at once. Why should I support another man's wife?"

"What else?" she asked after a pause. "Janet gets a nice little legacy. A charity or two, and three horticultural societies are remembered. But the bulk comes to me, and, that being the case, you can see the position in which it places me. I am bound to find Uncle Andrew, living or dead. Others may give up the search if they like, but I never can."

She let her heavy eyes rest on him.

"Because you won't get the money until he's proved—dead?"

He answered kindly and pityingly, as to a stupid child to whom matters must be made very plain.

"My dear Olive, because no man shall say that I have tried to profit by his misfortune. You've heard the well-

known quotation about Cæsar's wife? Cæsar had the right idea, but, to my mind, the phrase would have been even better if he had applied it to Cæsar himself. Forgive me if I am unduly sententious, but, in your case, one is driven to use words of one syllable."

"I'm sure he's dead," she said dully, as though it were the only thought her brain had room for. "Any news?"

Roderick's manner became businesslike at once.

"Yes, there is. I came primarily to tell you of it, when we got side-tracked on this not unimportant discussion. We've found traces——"

He stopped short. The door was opening.

CHAPTER VII.

If Janet had entered the room alone, Major Laurel would not have hesitated; but she was accompanied by his employee, John Betterton, and there was the look about them as though they had come together, instead of having accidentally met each other at the entrance.

"How-d'ye-do, Janet. Quite a family council," observed the major. If he had expected Betterton to take this hint and depart on his business, which was, also, Major Laurel's, he was mistaken.

Janet had hastened to Olive with a look of real concern and sympathy.

"Oh, you poor dear! Doesn't she look badly?" She appealed to Roderick. "No wonder! Won't you tell me what really happened? I've heard so little. It was last Saturday, wasn't it, that Cousin Andrew went away?" She took her place on the sofa beside Olive, but the latter turned her face toward Johnny, whose chair was on the other side of and a little in front of her.

"Saturday afternoon, late," she answered. "I spent Sunday with the Parkmans, on the Sound. Monday afternoon a message came from Andrew's old partner, Mr. Fulham, that

seemed important."

"I thought he had retired," Janet interrupted.

"Andrew? So he has, but every now and then they ask him for his advice. He still has interests in the firm. I hadn't been alarmed by Andrew's absence, because he had told me that he might be away for a few days." She appealed suddenly to Johnny. "You were here that afternoon. Didn't you hear him say so?"

"I—I don't remember," said Johnny uncomfortably. He had heard Mr. Crothers say nothing of the kind, yet his inability to corroborate Olive's statement gave him the feeling that he was failing her in some way. Major Laurel's searching glance added to his discomfiture. To the best of his recollection, the old man had announced his intention of returning that same night.

"Well, he must have said so later. I telephoned to Xanadu—it takes ages to get them—and Mrs. Goldie, the caretaker's wife, answered, and said that no one had come there; they hadn't seen Andrew at all. She was very much upset about it; she's one of those imaginary invalids who are really as strong as a horse. Then I sent for you, Roderick." Her eyes filled. "Ever since, I've been living in a nightmare. I've been tormented by all sorts of people. You made me see them."

The major's tone was patiently kind.
"It was better that you should. I
know that it's been hard for you."

"Hard!" The inadequacy of the word struck her as an offense. "When the day's over I feel torn to pieces. And my mail—I wish you read my mail. Pamphlets from confidential detectives, and notes from my friends explaining why they haven't called, and—and mourning advertisements, even. Not to speak of long letters from perfect strangers, most of them crazy, suggesting their solutions of the mystery. That's what it is—the Crothers mystery! I'm a public show. What could

be worse?" She threw out her hands. "What have you heard, Roderick?"

The major could not resist a slight tinge of irony.

"I've been waiting patiently to tell you." If Olive didn't mind taking this young man into their confidence, why need he? "The car has been found."

There was a cry from Olive, a gasping exclamation from Janet. Johnny leaned forward.

"He hasn't been-"

Roderick lifted his hand.

"No. It isn't as bad as it might be. No one was in the car."

"Abandoned?"

"Yes, and wrecked. They identified it by the license plate. That had survived."

Olive's fingers worked through each other, but she did not interrupt him again.

"The car was found, completely smashed, at the bottom of a height near the river, having evidently gone right over the edge. Then the tank seems to have exploded. The fire, of course, has destroyed everything inflammable, but it is certain that there would be traces left, if a human being had been in the car—and there are no such traces."

"You mean, Andrew and the chauffeur got out first?"

"They must have."

"Up above," Johnny suggested, "on the cliff, aren't there footprints or tire marks that would tell anything?"

Roderick shook his head.

"Too confused. It rained hard that night."

Janet came out of a brown study.
"It couldn't have been an accident."
"What else could it have been?" cried
Olive feverishly.

"Then where are the bodies?" Major Laurel asked in the direct manner which enabled him to say most things without seeming officious or callous. "There's no use in trying to treat this like an ordinary occurrence, and confining it

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inside the bounds of reasonableness. It's queer—queer all through. The best quality to use in connection with it is your imagination." He swung on Janet, and Johnny noticed that it was not the first time that the major had favored her with a special attention. "What does your imagination report? A bandit story?"

"I thought of that first, of course," said the girl thoughtfully. "By the time the car reached the river it may have

been dark."

Major Laurel was the man to use plain English when it was necessary.

"If bandits had held up the car, killed the occupants, and thrown their bodies in the river, the bodies would probably have been found before this. The police have been watching the river." He turned to Johnny. "What do you think?"

"What I've thought from the beginning. The chauffeur, that uncanny Scot—I don't like to suspect a man unjustifiably, but I didn't like his face."

"Neither did I. I couldn't endure

him," Olive murmured.

It turned out that none of them liked his face, nor his crooked walk. After Olive had told of her unsuccessful attempt to make her husband discharge him, Roderick would have speculated, "Could he have had a hold over the old man?" except that one does not say these things before a man's wife. Instead he asked:

"Your idea is that he—the chauffeur Scrymgeor—used foul play? How did he get away with the body?"

The presence of Olive made it hard to discuss the matter frankly until she cried out:

"Don't mind me. You mean he killed my husband? Perhaps he had a confederate waiting with another car."

"In that case, and it's a feasible supposition, he need not have killed Cousin Andrew at all," Janet put in.

"He may have kidnaped him," Johnny

added hopefully, "and is holding him for ransom. In that event, we'll hear from him before long."

Major Roderick sighed.

"That doesn't commend itself to my intelligence. What makes me afraid of the worst is that I have reason to believe that my uncle was carrying a large amount in bonds with him. He had them earlier in the day when I spoke with him over there in the library, and they have not been found in the house. It is known that he did not leave the house until that last drive. He may have sent them out, but that isn't likely. My belief is that he had those bonds on his person when he disappeared."

"And Scrymgeor knew it," Johnny supplemented. "He was a younger and stronger man than Mr. Crothers; if it came to a fight, he'd have had it all his own way—though he did slump so," he

added.

The door into the hall moved dis-

"What is it, Sanders?" Olive inquired wearily.

The butler, avoiding Roderick's eye, answered:

"Mrs. Parkman, madame, asks to see you, in regard to an affair of importance."

"Very well," said Olive resignedly. "Don't go, Roderick. Oh, Nannie dear, how good of you to come! You know everybody, I think."

Around the edge of her friend's affectionate embrace the newcomer regarded the assembled company. She was a small, excessively smart woman, just older enough than Olive to make her protective manner pardonable.

"My dear," she began, "I ran into town because I had just heard a rumor a rumor which I thought you ought to know." She glanced meaningly around the circle.

Olive reassured her.

"You can say anything. These are all my intimate friends." Mrs. Parkman's dainty features underwent a change signifying that she placed the onus of these public confidences on Olive's shoulders where they belonged.

"I know it's a horrid way to begin. When people want to be particularly nasty they assure you that they come as friends. But, oh, Olive dear, I do—really I do!"

"I'm sure of it," responded Olive like a gentle martyr. "It's no news to me that unpleasant things are being said. I prefer to know."

"Oh, how wise of you to take it in that way!" sighed the bearer of ill tidings. "Of course, it's needless to say that we, your friends, don't believe a word of it. Ned is positively rabid over what he calls the evil-mindedness of this generation. I'm telling everybody that there isn't a word of truth in the story that you and Mr. Crothers had a disagreement just before—he went away."

"My husband and I have been on quite as good terms as most married couples," said Olive with dignity. Roderick, in spite of his disgust, gave an inward whoop of appreciation. Pinked! That thrust was neat; the Parkmans were reputed to live a catand-dog life.

The sting at least gave Mrs. Parkman the requisite assurance to continue.

"I'm sure of it, dear. And as for that other unfortunate rumor that—"

"Go on," Olive urged. "After what I've been through during the last low days, I can stand anything. What are they saying?"

"That Mr. Crothers left you because—there was a young man always about the house—that he objected——" Mrs. Parkman blurted out; then stopped short with open mouth as a new and unexpected element entered the tense atmosphere. It was a clear thrill of laughter from a girl, quite a sweet, well-dressed girl, who had been seated so quietly on the sofa.

"I think it's my cue," said the girl delightfully. "Yes, the young man was always about the house, and Cousin Andrew did object just at first, until the young man got an excellent job with Major Laurel. There has been just one infinitesimal mistake. You see, he is my young man. Mr. Betterton and I are engaged."

"Certainly," said Johnny. His voice sounded wooden in his own ears, but he had recognized in a flash that this was the only way out, the way to scotch the scandal at the beginning.

There was a pregnant silence; then the visitor, with a rush of words, half congratulation and half apology, got herself out of the room. Olive went with her, and, in the second when the major's back was toward them as he opened the door, Johnny felt a fiery pinch on his wrist and heard a fierce whisper of command:

"Don't dare to contradict it! Let them believe it!"

"But-"

"Oh, you idiot!" breathed the girl in an agony of insistence. "No, more than two people can keep a secret. Four let it leak out, always." With a lightning change to her old smile, she skimmed across to Roderick, slipped her hand under his arm, and led him out. Before Johnny had had time to thresh out in his own mind the peculiar way in which the situation had affected the major, Olive came hurrying back, and closed the door sharply behind her.

"What does it mean?" she demanded. Her face, drawn into lines of suspense and exasperation, was ugly. Dropping on the sofa, she put her face in her hands and ground the heels of her slippers into the thick pile of the rug. "If I have to see many more fools, I shall go crazy! What did Janet mean by saying you belonged to her? How dare she? Or are you like all the other men I've known?" She threw her head back and raked him with burning eyes.

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"Ready to flirt with any decent-looking chit, no matter how much you may be in love with another woman? You're as despicable as the rest, I suppose. I was a lunatic to think you different. Why should you be?"

In spite of Janet's orders, Johnny had had no intention of allowing Olive to be deceived. Now, however, under the insulting lash of her contempt, he found a resolve hardening inside him. was committing the unpardonable sin against love; she was taking for granted his fundamental worthlessness; she was crediting him with the lowest motives, the vilest duplicity. What sort of nature did she herself have, if she could so easily believe evil of him? Well, if that was her opinion, why should he condescend to put himself right? Goaded on by his silence, she burst out again, in a passion hardly articulate but as deadly as a hissing flow of lava.

"I could have got on perfectly well with him, if it hadn't been for you. I didn't know how unhappy I was until you came. At first I found you amusing, a distraction; you made me feel alive; I thought I could play with youlike the others. But I couldn't. You were too good for that. And then I found I couldn't live without seeing you. And you did care—you did! What did you mean by saying that you were devoted to me? How can you change as soon as that?" There was a horrible suggestion of crawling in the movement with which she dragged herself nearer to him. "I've heard of men who made love to a married woman, and thenwhen the way was open-might be open -to stand by her-married some one else, just to get out of it!"

So she could think that of him. That finished it!

"Why don't you say you never made love to me?" she taunted, still in that deadly, underground sort of voice. She moved her hands strangely. "You said —devoted. You could be devoted to a friend, a grandmother, couldn't you? And I believed you—your voice, your eyes, your continual—falsehood of love!" The words dropped separately. After a silence she said: "I am sure that he is dead." The certainty sent a shiver through him. Why should she be so sure?

Suddenly the revelation came to him that there was no reason why he should remain here, no unbreakable imposition on him to stay as the target of her anguish and her reproaches. The compassion he had felt for her was still there, but a strong, not-to-be-disregarded impulse, as powerful as an instinct of self-preservation, was pushing him away from her, out into the air, away from this sultry, cavelike place of threat and ruin.

Without uttering a word he left the house.

CHAPTER VIII.

"There are two ways in which men disappear," said Major Laurel in the dogmatic tone which he adopted when anticipating contradiction. "Their disappearance may be involuntary—or it may not."

Johnny did not supply the opposition; he was beginning to know his employer too well. Ever since Janet had announced her engagement, the major had taken in the young man a quite searching, not to say critical interest, which extended to inviting him to spend entire evenings with him, an experience which was, to say the least, a liberal education in learning how comfortably a wealthy bachelor could live. Having no inside information on the duration of his earthly career, as Major Laurel said, he did himself as well as possible while it lasted.

These attentions gave their recipient some amusement. It was not that the major took any particular joy in his society; indeed, Johnny occasionally felt that he produced upon his host a distinct worry. The latter was merely

determined to know him well, to study his possibilities, to be sure that Janet wasn't throwing herself away.

"What's your solution?" Johnny in-quired, not too anxiously. Lying back in his chair with a cigar between his languid lips, and a general relaxation extending from his handsome blond head to his slim feet, he might well have produced in a more active man the restlessness which was sending the major striding up and down his big, luxurious

"I think he threw up an impossible situation," he declared succinctly.

Johnny sat up.

"Went away—on purpose?"
"Quit cold. The fact that he had those bonds on him makes me certain. A hundred thousand dollars-enough for a man to start life again, or to melt quietly into another part of the world. I was amazed that he was carrying them, but he assured me that he intended to deposit them in a safe place that very day. I took for granted he meant his safety deposit box at his bank. I'm surprised this disappearing act isn't done oftener," said the major meditatively. "It is, in the lower classes, I be-The more important a man is, the less liberty he has; he can't slip away so easily." He moved up the room, talking monotonously. course, we needn't ignore the point that he was jealous of you. Knowing my Uncle Andrew, I hardly think that he was animated by any self-sacrificing impulse to clear the way for Olive to live her own life and find her extra-legal happiness, as the romantic rot puts it. I think he simply couldn't stand the situation any longer-pride too hard hit; felt he wasn't young enough to stay and make a fight." With one of his sudden pounces, he swung round on Johnny. "I take for granted there was no real reason for his jealousy?"

"None whatever."

"Humph! You'd be bound to say

that, in any case," grumbled Roderick. "However, I believe you. My prophecy is that we shan't find hair or hide of my Uncle Andrew this many a long daynever, perhaps. And that"-he dropped into the chair opposite Johnny, at last, and sat with his hands on his knees, to match the other's attitude of attention-"and that leaves me in the devil's own fix."

"Yes," Johnny acquiesced politely. It was not necessary for Roderick to explain his assertion as he had been forced to do with Olive. This young man caught the point.

"Moreover," Roderick went "there's the business side of it. man's neither alive nor dead, and it takes a pot of money to run an establishment like the Crothers'. She's beginning to find difficulties, though she has consented to shut up the house-it was becoming unbearable, what with the crowd of investigators, official and otherwise-and move to the country place."

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"Xanadu," said Johnny. The name charmed him.

"Yes, Xanadu. Now she's dissatisfied with that; says it gets on her nerves; wants to rent it out."

"Don't the courts make some provision in these cases-allow a certain amount?"

"Of course they do," spurted the major. "But we don't want to appeal to the courts yet. Looks too much like giving up, accepting the fact that the man's not coming back-dead, or hopelessly missing. Mighty inconsiderate of the old man, I call it. Natural enough he had grievances against his wife, but I never did anything to him."

Johnny smiled in the superior manner of a chess player who has been watching an artless opponent play, knowing he could checkmate him whenever he liked.

"Your theory is very interesting, Major Laurel," he said, laying his cigar on the bronze stand at his elbow, "but

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I stick to mine: Scrymgeor held him up, robbed, and killed him. I stick to it especially—since they've found traces of Scrymgeor."

"Why didn't you tell me that first?"

shouted Roderick.

"Because," Johnny responded placidly, "it's as well to examine every hypothesis. You get new ideas on your own."

"How was it you got the news of this before I did? Why wasn't it reported

to me?"

"I know you're the natural—well er—this came to me unofficially this afternoon. Janet had just got it from Mrs. Crothers, who got it from Goldie the caretaker, who got it——"

"Pshaw!" The major dismissed it.

"From a friend of his who happened to be at a small station, near the place where the car was found. He's ready to swear that he saw Scrymgeor take a train there, that evening."

"The evening of the disappearance?"
"Yes! He says that he didn't see
Scrymgeor's face, but he'd recognize his
back anywhere. You know that peculiar
walk he had, not a limp, and his way of
carrying his shoulders, not a hump, but
—recognizable."

"Who is this man?"

"A market gardener named Brownell who has a place in the neighborhood. Says he's seen the chauffeur a hundred times. He has no doubt he was the man he saw board the train."

"He may be right," admitted the major robustly. "But that confirms my theory. If the old man wanted to disappear, he might bribe Scrymgeor to fade away, too; make it worth his while to become beautifully less in these parts, because he didn't care to leave a witness. Uncle Andrew had had the man for years, felt he could trust him. The thing to do now is to find out where Scrymgeor was going. I'll run down to that station to-morrow. What did you say its name was?"

"Monckton."

"I know it. I'll get there early and jog the memory of the ticket seller."

Johnny took the hint.

On the way home he passed the building where, as Olive had expressed it, a thousand little writers and artists lived. He glanced reflectively up at the particular window behind which, at this hour, presumably slept the little writer to whom he was-and was not-engaged. Under the pressure of the atmosphere she was becoming quite daringly unconventional, intentionally and quaintly so, but she might consider a call at this hour-unnecessary. Besides, she had taken him only that afternoon to an artists' tea, and had, no doubt, seen enough of him. She had been charming in a costume of almond-green with a cape to match, like a little Chinese carving. It was only after they had left that he discovered that the tea was an accompaniment to a private exhibition of pictures at which he ought also to have looked. This new life of Janet's was full of amusing surprises; he wanted to see more of it.

CHAPTER IX.

Major Laurel was reporting to Olive. he did this punctiliously at stated intervals, and, also, whenever any new discovery seemed to demand the occasion. He found their relationship less trying than he had feared. After she had recognized that a free give and take was the only basis he recognized, he had become surprisingly amenable.

"What's the trouble now?" he began

cordially.

Olive glanced around her. They were seated in the great bow window of the hall at Xanadu—a bow that was filled with the young azaleas and camellias and other tender plants that would be transferred to the garden later. Outside in the borders tulips and daffodils were plentiful, and the fruit trees were a cloud of color, but Goldie insisted on

a settled warmer spell before he risked what he called his semi-tropicals.

"I sometimes believe," said Olive in a low tone, "that he wants an excuse—both of them do—to linger about the house. Generally he wanted to transplant too early. They come to water them and—"

Through the glass Roderick saw a tall, gaunt woman dressed in black coming through the avenue of apple trees that stretched toward the back, where the kitchen garden lay. She was like some stray that winter had overlooked.

"I hate this place, anyway." his hostess exclaimed passionately. "I've always hated it."

"It's a charming place, I consider. Nothing particularly magnificent or even unusual about the house, except the peculiar twin clumps of chimneys, but the grounds are delightful. That arrangement of groups of trees on the lawn, quincunx fashion, and the double row curving to the highway—nothing could be more graceful. In spring it's as sweet a prospect as one could wish. Uncle Andrew," remarked the major, remembering that he was a cynic, "planted this place as carefully as though

it held his wild oats."

Olive's hand beat a tattoo on the arm of her chair. She showed no curiosity concerning her husband's wild oats, which, as Roderick told himself, is a very bad sign.

"I don't feel safe here," she argued. "You'll think me a fool if I tell you why."

"Very likely," said Roderick indulgently. She was, after all, a strikingly pretty woman, though her increasing nervousness was ruining her as a pleasing companion.

"There's something wrong about the house. Noises at night, footsteps, rustlings in the shrubbery."

"Regular country-house noises. They

"But these are different," she pro-

tested. She laid her hand on his and he felt how cold her trembling fingers were. "Ever since Mrs. Goldie saw the ghost——" an

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"She would. She's the living image of a spook hunter. If I were a ghost, I should naturally gravitate to her for sympathy."

"Hush!" whispered Olive. A soft, disconsolate voice behind him made him jump. The woman had glided in without a sound.

"Please, ma'am," the jaded accents informed them, "that back winder was open again this morning. Goldie will put a new bolt on it, if you wish it." As she came nearer she brought with her the odor of cheap black cloth.

"You see!" Olive turned to her guest, at this vindication of her fears, with intensity. "It isn't safe. Tell Major Laurel about the ghost you saw, Mrs. Goldie."

For the first time Roderick paid her words the compliment of serious attention. He didn't know whether this was due to his realization that she was serious, to the point of making herself ill, or whether, against his better judgment, Mrs. Goldie's personality was influencing him. She might have been a specter herself; her figure's furtive stoop might have come from peering around corners; and the hollows in her cheeks were of a strange, brownish cast, like the shadows of a dusty garret. It was evident that she took a gloomy pride in her experiences, common to dabblers in the occult.

"I was coming downstairs, sir," she began. "It was late, the day Mrs. Crothers had sent me word she was to be expected, and I was getting the upstairs rooms ready. Downstairs was dark, and I stopped on the middle landing and felt for the button to turn on the lights when—I didn't."

"Why?"

She had stopped, with fine dramatic instinct, for a question.

"Because"—the woman gathered her

angular shoulders together and spoke in a tragic whisper—"suddenly I saw a light down there. Not to call a light—more a glimmer or a flush—but strong enough to see shapes. And a shape came out of the dark and crossed it! It wasn't white; more of no particular color, like the dark itself, and not much like a human person; sort of shapeless and humped. But I knew it was a ghost."

"How?" asked Roderick. Olive, very pale, was listening intently, expecting, he fancied, other details than these which

she had already heard.

"What else could it be?" the woman asked with simplicity. "I knew it by the way a kind of shiver went through the roots of my hair. Perhaps you've been to séances, sir, or read books about them. Then you'll know that they make use of your flesh and blood, draw it out of you—enough to materialize, anyway, so you can see them. That shiver over the scalp is one of the signs they're doing it. Haven't you ever felt it?"

It was no news to Roderick that the séance habit was one widely practiced, drawing its votaries from all classes. If Mrs. Goldie was addicted to it, her occult story was accounted for. Looking for such phenomena, of course she

found them.

"As soon as I could move I rushed out and called Goldie, and we searched the house from top to bottom. Nobody! I forgot to say, the same time it vanished the light went, too."

"Was there any sound?"

"My heart was beating so I couldn't have heard, unless it was a loud one. It just crossed the hall. Somehow, it wasn't like an ordinary ghost—the kind that send you loving messages from the beyond. I've met lots of those at séances, and some of them was real pleasant, and, of course, live people were round. This one—you felt, if it caught you, it might do you a mischief."

Olive shuddered.

"Have you seen it since?" Roderick inquired, impressed in spite of his common sense. The woman was as eerie as a dead pine tree swaying and groaning in a windy night, and spilling buzzards on the ground. He had seen such trees in the south. There was an unwholesome power about her.

"Once, outside, when it was moonshine. It slid into the bushes before I could hardly see it. And once, I think, at nightfall, looking out at that back winder; but I couldn't be sure then,

either."

"Did it resemble any one you knew,

that you had ever seen?"

At the quick flash of her narrow black eyes he would have sworn that she had dreaded the question, disliked answering it. She said resentfully:

"I don't want to do nobody an in-

justice."

"But you are sure it was a disem-

bodied creature, not a man?"

"Oh, yes, sir!" There was no doubt about her genuine conviction, Roderick decided. After she had gone he drew a deep breath. The atmosphere was lighter. Olive pressed her hands over her cheeks.

"Now do you wonder that it gets on my nerves?" she challenged.

He answered the drawn, burned-out

gaze.

"I can't say that I do, though I think it's more that woman than the house. She's hypnotic. There's something catching and virulent about her—a regular devil's grandmother. Very well, Olive, if you want to rent this place I'll see what can be done about it. But why don't you have some one to stay with you? Then you wouldn't be so lonely."

"Janet, I suppose," she said with a

hard laugh.

"Why not? She would enjoy the garden, and her work's the kind she can do anywhere."

She was staring at him.

"And I thought you a clever man."

"I am. It is universally admitted, not to say trumpeted."

"How would you like to have Johnny Betterton for a bosom friend?"

"Exactly what I'm making of him."

"Then you're either more altruistic or less easily hurt than I am."

Roderick got up and became absorbed

in a budding pink camellia.

"My dear Olive, don't tell me what you might regret later. Unless I can help you—and I hardly see how I can. The voice of nature has spoken, and who am I to gainsay it? They're about the same age, and that seems to be the crucial and essential point. I was years too old."

"Yes," he heard the murmur, "but I

was not."

He faced her.

"You're a married woman. I'm no prude, but I believe in playing the game. Let the young things be happy, and make the best of it."

She spoke in the same panting tone she had used in telling him of her super-

stitious fears.

"I'm sure Andrew is dead. Not even Andrew could be so cruel as to go away, without a word, and leave me like this, neither married nor a widow. When you catch that horror, Scrymgeor, you'll find that I'm right."

"Unfortunately, we seem as far from

catching him as ever."

"But you traced him to Newark."

"We did—or the man who resembled him. We even found out that he had cashed a small post-office check. Then all traces evaporated, and he vanished into thin air."

"But you're not giving up the search?"

"I'm never giving it up. I've got the best men on the job that can be found. Watch and pray. They'll do the watching, and"—he looked down on her satiny black head, bowed under its heavy coils, and said with a curious change of tone—"it won't do you any harm to pray." In his heart he added: "You'd

better pray, you poor wretch. If he doesn't turn up, it may be years and years before they'll pronounce him legally dead and let you marry again."

As though she had heard him she

cried out poignantly:

"What am I to pray for? For him to come back? You don't know! You couldn't have borne it. It's easy enough to talk, if you don't know."

He walked the length of the hall before speaking, and then he ignored alto-

gether that wild outbreak.

"Before I go I want to walk through the grounds," he said. "I'll come in to say good-by. And I'll let you know at once, if there is any news."

There was news, sooner than he anticipated, and the last variety of it that he could have suspected. On his return Olive came running to meet him, holding out a sheet of note paper that trembled in her grasp.

"We found this on the dining-room

table," she gasped.

On the paper was an extraordinary collection of scratches, not like characters produced by any human hand. They were uncanny, sinister, the marks that some half-human, half-brute creature might have evolved. But they formed words.

Roderick deciphered them, and the chill tremor of which the gaunt woman had spoken passed through the roots of his hair. He read:

Rent out Xanadu at your peril!

CHAPTER X.

A little interlude happened to Johnny Betterton about this time. One morning, as he was about to enter the dignified building which sheltered the offices of Major Laurel, he heard himself hailed. With a mixture of liking and repugnance, he recognized Johnson, from whom he had once taken orders. Johnson presented his usual prosperous and well-nourished appearance, but

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there was an unaccustomed haggardness about his eyes, and a trick of gnawing the inner side of his cheek was very much in evidence.

"Hello, Johnson!"

"Hello! How's every little thing?"

"All right."

"Working here?"

"Yes, selling lots. Can't we interest you in an attractive suburban extension?"

The other grunted.

"About the only piece of real estate you could interest me in would be a cemetery lot."

"What's the matter? Business bad?" Johnson shrugged one shoulder.

"The money side's all right; that's a gusher. But I'm getting sort of disgusted. You got out in time. We've had a stroke of bad luck."

Johnny felt no curiosity to hear it. His distaste for the old life had never been stronger than now that he was brought face to face with it again. He felt in his pocket.

"By the way," he said. "I want to return that money you lent me. Meant to look you up."

"Oh, that's all right," Johnson an-

swered indifferently.

"Much obliged to you for the loan," Johnny added formally. He had a definite feeling of relief in severing this bond. Curious, the more he saw of Janet-her cleanness that didn't depend on ignorance in the least, her discrimination—the more unpleasant this old stuff became. He owed Janet a lot. And Major Laurel, who had given him a chance on her say-so, and on the few decent references he had managed to seine up out of his earlier work-he owed him something, too. Whom didn't he owe? At least, he was paying up the debts that could be paid like this, in the currency of the republic. He would have hunted Johnson up sooner, except for the letter he had received from his mother-a cheerful letter which informed him that her new treatment was doing her no end of good, but that the southern rooms, though a trifle more expensive, made all the difference in the world to a person as sensitive as she was to the view.

"Yes," Johnson harped on gloomily; "some of the fellows had a pretty bad accident." He strolled into the entrance with Johnny, reluctant to leave him without unburdening himself.

His intonation pierced through the other's aversion.

"Nobody killed, I hope."

Johnson glanced up and down the corridor.

"None of them."

As he went on to describe time and place, his listener's gaze became more and more intent. He asked curt, exact questions, until Johnson, warming to this unexpected sympathy, told all that there was to be told. He hadn't been in it; it wasn't in the line of his duties; but when a man trusted with the delivery of the stuff couldn't keep sober enough himself not to get gay with his gun, what was the world coming to? Whom could you depend on, eh?

After Johnson had gone on his disillusioned way, Johnny Betterton proceeded to Major Laurel's sanctum, to be met in the outer office by the sleek young woman who privately considered him a fit subject for maiden reveries, and who informed him languishingly that he couldn't see the major yet. It appeared that a very important person was closeted with him-an individual of such magnitude, in the world which is concerned with the investigation of crime and the bringing of it to justice, that one hesitates to mention his name. The young woman indicated that she was more than willing to keep Johnny's period of waiting from hanging heavily on his hands. From the peculiar brilliancy of his eyes she hoped the best, but after a few minutes of conversation she came to the conclusion either that he

was stupid, or else that he was thinking of something else. In this latter supposition she was entirely correct.

Inside the private room, Major Laurel was having a disturbing interview. He himself had no hesitation, by the way, in mentioning the name of the personage. They had known each other since their early days. It may comfort the ordinary to learn that the great of the earth use, in their intimacies and délassements, the same vernacular as the rest of us.

"Hello, Rod!"

"Hello, Bill!"

"How's every little thing?"

"All right. Have one?"

After they had smoked for a few minutes, the effect being that of a pipe of peace, the visitor asked, out of a corner of his mouth.

"Any news?"

"No-nothing but a ghost story."

"No trace of the chauffeur yet? That trail cold, eh?"

"Yes!" Roderick's short replies brought a glimmer of a smile to the full,

expressive lips.

"Getting worried, eh? Well, Rod, I came in this morning to tell you that, for your sake and for your sake alone, I've been as considerate as has been in any way consistent with my duty. My men haven't had any better success in the Newark line than those high-priced specialists you've slipped on the job. The public's getting restive. polite remarks in the papers about the incompetence of the police and the prevalence of the crime wave. There isn't any crime wave, I tell you! We're not half so bad as some other cities. Look at Chicago! Oh, well! But in this case, this Crothers mystery, it's time for some sort of a show-down."

"I see. It's time for somebody's head

to fall."

The fresh-colored, slightly pearshaped face puckered.

"That's no way to put it. If you

imagine this is going to be a cheerful interview for me, any more than for yourself, you're mistaken. It may interest you to know that a man named Sanders has given some information. Seemed to think you wanted him to keep quiet, but a sense of duty, or, more likely, a sense of safety first, urged him to speak. He says, that just before leaving the house, Crothers had a terrific quarrel with his wife, a violent and abusive scene, during which he knocked her down."

Roderick pressed his lips together.

They were dry.

"Nonsense! Piffle!" he said robustly. "The man's half deaf, so naturally heard a great deal more than ever happened; filled up the gaps with his imagination." Meeting the other's half-amused, half-compassionate glance, he continued slowly: "If you're going to say what I think you're going to say, I can tell you, you'll be talking infernal nonsense."

"I'm sorry. I can't do otherwise. The outcome is—considering the servant's testimony and what we've traced concerning the"—his glance shifted to the end of his cigar, which he had removed from his lips—"the previous history of the young man, I consider it my duty to make an arrest."

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Roderick relaxed. Perceiving it, the other's smile glimmered again.

"We're not going to arrest the young man—yet," he said.

"I won't pretend to misunderstand you," Roderick said sardonically. "But while you're about it, why not arrest me? Plenty of motive. Most of the estate is left to me."

He had, at last, succeeded in making an impression:

"Is that so?" asked the great man in a warmly congratulatory tone. "Well, that strengthens my theory of the unhappy domestic life in the Crothers family. Cuts her off, does he?"

"Not in the least. Provides well for

her. How about me?"

His friend shook his head.

"Not sufficient motive. You have plenty of money already. Besides, everybody knows you," he added with a smile that was a tribute. "On the other hand, the motive is plain. Old husband, bad terms, unhappy home life, large amount of money to inherit—she didn't know the terms of the will, eh?—and the interest in the young man."

"As for that, you can cut it out. You know that he's going to marry another

woman, don't you?"

"I know that the engagement was announced, very neatly and opportunely, just in time to mitigate, if not to stop, an unpleasant piece of gossip. My dear Rod, I don't want to be disagreeable, but that's one of the commonest stage tricks. Ever read a novel by Dumas where the king finds Marie Antoinette's lover kneeling at her feet, and they divert his suspicions by switching him over to the maid of honor? It's queer," he went on reflectively, "how things work out. Life's little ironies, you may call them. I knew a case where a woman -er-eliminated her husband so thoroughly that he disappeared completely, and the courts refused to find him legally dead, and she had to wait years before she could marry the other chap. Shows a thing can be managed almost too well."

"You don't believe this theory of yours," said Roderick incredulously.

"I don't see why it should hit you so hard," the other returned with more sympathy. "You're not one of the fellows who believe that a pretty woman can do no wrong. Why, one of your own pet stories is about those Indian rajahs who petitioned the British government not to abolish the suttee, because the fear of it was all that restrained their loving wives from poisoning them." If you don't believe these things happen, read the papers, that's all."

"But we did trace the chauffeur."

Roderick clutched at the only straw he could remember.

"How do you know she didn't bribe the chauffeur to make away with the old man? Or, more probably, use him as the link with the men who did it—professionally? They exist, I assure you. Pretty nearly everything can be done for money. Of course, you've got to know how to approach them. The underworld has its etiquette, too."

"How long will you give me?" Roderick asked abruptly. "I mean, to produce evidence that you're on the wrong

track."

The great man rose.

"Unless I fear something worth con-

sidering, I shall act at once."

"Give me until to-morrow night. Don't look at me like that, Bill. I have no intention of smuggling her out of the country."

"You'd better not try. Sort of con-

fession, that would be.'

"Until to-morrow?"

"All right," the other agreed reluctantly.

In the relief of getting even that concession, the fierce hold that the major had been keeping on his temper slipped.

"But, confound it," he said tensely, "you're wrong! Why—this is a lady

of my family!"

The visitor shrugged helplessly. To this statement there was no reply. Friendship and business were an irreconcilable mixture, and, as Roderick himself might have put it, there is no delicate way of treating murder. Roderick, with automatic courtesy, escorted him to the elevator, but neither expressed himself further.

Major Laurel, on his return, found an excited young man waiting for him at the door of his room. Motioning him in, he looked the youth up and down, as though seeking in his appearance the key to mysteries. Being used to his employer's cryptic behavior, Johnny curbed his desire to speak.

"Helen of Troy!" observed the major, in a far-away voice. "Nothing in it. The factor that burned the topless towers of Illium was the fatal beauty of Paris, prince of that ilk."

Johnny felt himself grow red, but this was an appreciation which one could

hardly take personally.

"A world was well lost," Roderick continued tonelessly, "not because Cleopatra was fascinating, but because Anthony was. More trouble is caused in this world by a well-placed nose than by a well-placed machine gun." Seating himself, he inquired in a business tone: "Well?"

The only comment he made on Johnny's story, which was a replica of Johnson's, including everything but the latter's name, was:

"So you've been running with that gang?" He spoke, not angrily, but resignedly, as he accepted most discreditable stuff.

That involved another lengthy story. Johnny related it.

"I've told you this, sir," he concluded, because I have an idea."

The other nodded.

"Now listen to me," Roderick ordered, and proceeded to unfold the history of the ghost and the mysterious letter. "Does that fit in with your idea?"

"Did you compare the writing-"

"I compared it with that of every servant in the house. Some of them were huffy about producing specimens. I compared it with letters written by my uncle. Most especially, I compared it with the chirography of that Goldie woman, which was surprisingly cultivated. The characters are like nothing in heaven or earth. A specter or a gorilla might have perpetrated them, but, I swear, not a man."

Johnny's head tilted back, as if an inspiration had chucked him under the chin.

"It all fits."

"Then I'll tell you the rest." Hitching his chair nearer, Roderick said sternly: "You have been the means, consciously or not, of getting a woman into the most frightful and dangerous circumstances. Now, what can you and your idea do to save her from them?"

The force of the interview he had just lived through lost nothing in his reconstruction of it. At the end of the recital Johnny sat rigid, the color wiped

from his face.

"It's outrageous, outrageous!" he re-

peated. "To suspect her!"

"That's what I told him. Insulting and stupid." He spoke with redoubled indignation because a most perturbing memory, which had been muttering inside him for some time, was becoming more and more insistent. It was altogether beside the point, he assured himself; it was of no significance; but its complaint kept strengthening to a continuous, underground murmur. couldn't get away from it: the memory of Olive against a background of palms and pink blossoms, her head bowed, her finger tips thrust into the flesh of her cheeks, an indiscribable impression of hatred and loathing breathing from her whole person. Olive, crying in that shrill, dreadful voice: "You don't know! You couldn't have borne it. It's 'easy enough to talk if you don't know!" Olive, lamenting over her married life.

Johnny got up, squaring his shoulders, thrusting off the burden of distaste which interferes with the free action of

the will.

"I haven't seen Mrs. Crothers since the day we were all at the house together," he said steadily. "I hardly think she would care to receive me."

"Yes?" the major prompted.

"But, with your permission, I should like—without her being troubled, or, perhaps, even knowing that I was there—I should like to go to Xanadu this afternoon. Do you think I might?"

"Under the circumstances." an

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swered Roderick firmly, "I think you might,"

CHAPTER XI.

Having carefully timed his visit, Johnny arrived at Xanadu shortly before nightfall. He did not care to have any officious gardener or other servant offer to take his card to the house, or, more probably, inform him that Mrs. Crothers was receiving no one that afternoon, thus leaving him no choice but to withdraw. His dearest wish was to attract no attention whatever. Therefore it was with annoyance that he noticed a figure coming down the avenue of trees that curved from the grounds and completely screened the house from the highway.

The figure presented itself first as a segment of parasol, under which appeared a sash end, clear poppy in color, which outlined the sweep of a shortish skirt of an indeterminate hue which went divinely with the poppy. stockings, with shoes turned darker by the dust, completed an arrangement which was exceedingly attractive, though ill-timed. Johnny was about to impersonate a passer-by who had paused to admire the landscape, when the parasol tilted and the girl beneath it uttered a joyous crow. In spite of his better judgment, Johnny's brow cleared.

"I didn't know you were out here," he began.

"Now that's a nice, tactful thing to say," complained Janet. "I was brought by Roderick after lunch. He said Olive was lonesome and would be glad to have me." She added dolefully: "He was mistaken. When he was polite enough to ask me to go for a drive with them I judged it better to decline. I hoped," she went on wistfully, "you'd be glad to see me. Nobody else was."

"You're imagining things," Johnny assured her. "Mrs. Crothers was nervous, that's all. Perfectly natural."

"Did you want to see her?"

"No," he confessed frankly; "I wanted neither to see nor be seen." During their leisurely advance toward the house his mind had been making some readjustments. He could trust her, and, besides, he had a high appreciation of her powers of intuition and of rising to an emergency. Her announcement of their mythical engagement had proved it. Formerly they had exchanged jesting allusions to this, but, of late, they were ignoring the subject.

"That's polite, too."

"I'm delighted to see you. How's the ghost getting on?"

The girl paused apprehensively. The twilight was beginning to hang its veils between the trees, one over the other, violet sinking into gray, and mauve into ash. Objects were still discernible, but were losing their outlines and becoming an indescribable neutral tint.

"Don't speak of it," she said with a shiver. "I never believed in such things, but after listening to Olive and that saucer-eyed, skull-faced Mrs. Goldie, I'm being compelled into it. If you talk about them, they come. Even Roderick—"

"He doesn't suppose that it's supernatural?"

"He supposes it sufficiently to answer its letter." She gave a nervous giggle. "I wish you could have seen it—a most formal request for it to make itself plainer or depart in peace. He began: Your Serene Transparency.' I've always considered that the most lovely title."

They had lingered under one of the groups of trees on the lawn, a few paces from the avenue. This particular group was of evergreens, that had not had to wait for the spring to bring their foliage. The house spread itself before them, a formal shape with evenly spaced windows and two clumps of chimneys which seemed intended to be ornamental. Shrubbery grew thickly on both sides of the wide porch, and a festoon of

creepers was putting out feathery coverings along the heavy cornices. In the gathering dusk the whole was sending out fantastic, and, as it were, intentional shadows. Suddenly Johnny put out his arm and swept the girl into the shelter of the evergreens. Over her arm she was carrying a thin but full cape of dark silk, and he took it from her and threw it around her, covering her lightercolored dress.

"Look!" he whispered.

She had given a gasp, but at his tone she stiffened, as if she had expected him to say something very different. As she saw what he meant she did not touch him again, but her hands flew to her throat and crisped there. She stood transfixed.

"The ghost!"

From the darkness of the left wing a cowering, slinking figure had emerged. It was gray, like the rest of the picture, and it pressed itself into the obscurity, and moved from curve to curve of the foliated shadow, so that, had a wind been blowing, it would have seemed not more material than some heavier mass of creeper, swayed forward. Opposite a recess, where a small side door appeared to be, it hesitated, and then took cover, pressing itself as close to the ground as possible. To reach the door it would have to cross a small clearer space, and it waited on the edge of it, reconnoitering the ground.

"That's what I came for," Johnny To make breathed in the girl's ear. himself understood without betrayal, he found it necessary to place his lips very close to the waves of brown hair, and he found his emotional disturbance appreciably increased. "No matter what it is or where it leads, I'm going to fol-

low it."

"What-what do you think it is?" faltered Janet.

The vague shape had made up its mind. It detached itself from the overhanging leafage; it rose to its feet and

went, turning its back to the watchers, into the vine-hung recess. As it crossed the interval of light its walk was peculiar: it was not quite a limp, and the shoulder nearer them was not

humped-quite.

I thought," "Just as muttered Johnny. He stepped forward. "Don't come with me," he ordered. "Go into the house and find Major Laurel." In his excitement he had forgotten that the major had driven out with Olive. The girl obeyed as well as might have been expected.

With a long, sliding step, as swift as it was noiseless, Johnny went on the trail of the apparition. The side door, which led, as he had guessed, into a passage, was open when he reached it. Peering in, he saw a glimmer of light which indicated a turning. From this point the hall of the house was visible, dark in the center, but lighter at each end, in the front from the wide, double front windows, and in the back from the great flower-filled curve of the bay. A faint, sliding noise swung Johnny In the dense shadow of the staircase he saw, he would have sworn, a thicker darkness move. Then light came there, a tall, thin ray, for no longer than summer lightning takes to flash and vanish.

The young man leaped forward, thrust his foot into the place where the bottom of the splinter of light had been, and found himself pushing back a section of the wall which gave way to him. Groping his way along another passage -he could feel the wall on either side as he advanced with extended armshe reached an obstruction. Then, for the first time, he perceived that he was not alone: a small foot, miscalculating its distance, was walking up the back of his.

He did not dare to protest in words, but he took her arm and indicated, by pushing her gently, that she must go back. The arm slid out of his clasp. He thrust his hands forward against the substance in front, and it opened on blackness. He barely saved himself from plunging onto a flight of steps that went down and down. At the bottom of the flight was another door which yielded to his pressure silently.

Although the darkness was almost

palpable, Janet shut her eyes.

"And, I suppose, if Childe Rowland had had some fool girl trailing after him," she said bitterly to herself, "she'd have followed him straight into the dark tower." And she followed him straight in. She heard the door swing shut between the two of them and the good safe world!

When she unscrewed her lids she saw Johnny leaning over a table with a lighted match in his fingers. On the table were two metal candlesticks with candles in them. In a moment the place

was full of disarming light.

Full, too, of a reassuring commonness. The space was shaft-shaped, going high up into a solid-looking ceiling. The arrangement afflicted Ianet's artistic sense with the regret of a lost opportunity: if she had made a secret roomand this could be nothing else-she would have made it so significant; and this one had been made so ordinary. One wall was given up to lockers and shelves, and under them stood a small steel safe. The walls were colored that most despairing of shades, French gray. There was a narrow cot, neatly made, a plain table, with a cushioned bench behind it, and one straight oak chair. There was, also, an alcove, with a curtain partly drawn, revealing a washstand. On the shelves stood a variety of articles, sorted according to their kinds: books, writing materials, cups, and plates. On the table, beside the candles, lay a notebook with a fountain pen stuck between the leaves; and on the other side of this stood a plain, tall, glass vase, full of spring flowers.

"Run to earth!" Johnny pointed to a decent but worn suit case that was shoved under the shelves, its side exhibiting the letters A. S. He bent down to make sure. "I was right. Did you notice his walk? Scrymgeor! doubled back on his tracks and has been hiding here. If he hadn't been forced out to forage, so that Mrs. Goldie saw him, he might have kept this up indefinitely. Of course, he wrote the ghost letter. Naturally, he'd object to have the place rented; it must have upset his plans sufficiently when Olive moved in. He expected to stay until the police got tired and relaxed their efforts, and then he would have lit out with the hundred thousand he stole. It's probably in that safe." He went over and examined it. "Tight. Come, you mustn't stay here. It must be ventilated in some way, but it isn't exactly salubrious," he added, wrinkling his nose. "Come!"

Janet was turning her glance from one corner to the next.

"It doesn't look—like him," she said strangely. "It's so neat, almost prim, isn't it?" She touched the jonquils in the glass, filmy white and yellow, very pathetic and captive in this built-in place. "Do you think Scrymgeor would bother with flowers?"

"Why not? I believe he used to help in the garden. You can't tell who are fond of flowers, and dogs, and children, and such things," argued Johnny. "You only say that because you're prejudiced against his looks; we all were." He laid his hand on the latch which held the door. "Come! There's no use staying here, now we've found it. don't want the man to get away. I hope he didn't see us." A trace of anxiety came into his triumphant voice. "I wonder where he slipped to. Through the hall into the pantry, I suppose; he must get food there. Come!" The latch rose and fell but the door did not move. Johnny threw himself against it without making the least impression on its solidity. Now that he noticed it, it gave him an uncomfortable feeling to see how massive it was.

"Hush!" said Janet sharply.

In the silence that fell on them like a threat, they distinctly heard a sound high above them. As clearly as though she had seen it the girl interpreted it.

"He's bolted the door at the top of the stairs, too!" she said with a dreadful, pale calm. "He must have slipped down and bolted this one while we were talking. We're trapped!"

CHAPTER XII.

"Nonsense!" cried Johnny. He assailed the door again until his arms ached and his hands were sore. The door regarded him as imperturbably as a Chinese joss, and presented a bland indifference to his efforts. When he stopped to rest he said with forced cheerfulness.

"We'll have to call, bang, make all the noise we can, until they hear us. You know this house. Whereabouts are we?"

"I think we're below the cellars," she answered. Her eyes were strained in the soft, dreamy light of the candles until they looked enormous. "We must be between the east clump of chimneys. Noise?" She gave an ironical little laugh. "Don't you suppose it's sound-proof? The servants must be above us, in the pantry or dining room—he timed his visit just before they would begin—getting the table ready for dinner. Do you hear them? Not a sound! It's as still as the grave." She added resolutely: "Anyway, we needn't give up yet. We can try."

For minutes—they did not notice how many—they made all the racket possible. With Janet's slipper, which she took off, they banged the safe. Search revealed no hammer, can opener, or even a stick of wood, but with the slipper heel they played tunes on the resonant surface, Janet having some confused memory that a sound carried not only according to its volume, but also according to its pitch. She even forced down the sick feeling of despair that was overwhelming her, and sang, in the highest tones of her voice, until she was hoarse. At last they faced each other with blank surmise.

"How long have we been here?"

Janet asked.

"I haven't my watch with me. I left it to be repaired just before I came out here. That fits in, too," meditated Johnny ruefully. "Have you ever read a story where people were shut up or marooned or stranded, where their watches didn't stop?"

Then the girl brought home to her companion more forcibly than she could have done by any other act, that she had braced herself for the worst. She was sitting on the bench beside the table. She leaned over and blew out one of the candles.

"We ought to make them last as long as possible," she said. "It would be

awful here-in the dark."

This thought suggested another, even more disconcerting. His glance swept the shelves. Except for a plate which contained some scraps, there seemed to be no food on them whatever. If the inhabitant of the room had provided himself with any canned food, he had evidently exhausted it, and had tucked the empty cans away. He would hardly have carried them out with him, neat as his habits seemed to be, for fear of leaving clews. It was unprofitable enough to speculate on that subject. Evidently his errand that evening had been connected with replenishing the larder. They had dropped in at an unfortunate time. Johnny quietly opened one locker after the other. Most of them were empty, the rest full of papers or books. Certainly there was nothing to eat in any of them.

Candles were edible. The very gruesomeness of the thought brought a forced cheerfulness back into his manner. It was absurd for them to be worried yet. Judging by the candles, they had not been here very long. Or had they? He had forgotten how many hours a candle was supposed to burn. Anyway, it was undoubtedly his duty to keep Janet from morbid fears as long as possible.

"They'll miss you, you know," he said with creditable liveliness. "Then there'll be a search. Somebody may

know about this room."

She rested her elbows on the table and propped her chin on her folded hands, as if remembering that she was very tired.

"Hardly."

"And Scrymgeor will have to come back some time for the bonds. He isn't

going to sacrifice them."

"He'll come back—some time," answered the girl significantly. The implication brought a dryness to his throat. After they could do him no harm, Scrymgeor would return, not before.

"They may catch him," the optimist pursued. "Then he'll tell that we're here. It would be good business for him—make them feel more kindly to-

ward him."

Janet looked steadily at him from under her brows.

"Didn't you understand that he meant to shut you up here? As for me, he may not have seen me. We were near enough together to be taken for one person, out there, under the trees. Later, when I slid after you it was dark, and he had his back turned."

"You think he saw me from the be-

ginning?"

"I'm sure of it. His waiting, his deliberately coming out into the light, was to lure you on. Then, when you followed the crack of light and entered the passage he must have slipped aside and hidden in the hall. He was behind us after that, instead of in front. Having committed one murder, as he must have done, he had to commit another to make himself safe and conceal the first. He'll never let us out of this alive. We know too much."

With her words he looked the truth in the face. That clarity of mind came to him which comes only in seasons of danger or of ultimate emotion, seasons when the little interests of life drop away and leave the field to the utmost need of the soul. He leaned over the girl and pressed her head against him.

"I got you into this," he said all but inaudibly. "I got you into this. I'd rather have died a thousand times. I deserve what may be coming to me, but

you-"

She clung to him. She could not speak, because, under the bittersweet of the instant, a submerging sense of the future stifled her. It was not her own future which was clear, but, as plainly as she had noticed the road and his figure standing on it that afternoon—the afternoon that seemed so direfully far off—she saw another unforgetable vision: It was the ruined gold of Johnny's hair prone on the floor of this awful place, clotted with spider webs. She had to grind her teeth together to keep back her sobs. She wouldn't!

The dreadful thing pulsed through her and passed. Spunkily enough, she drew away and sat up straight. He shouldn't have to carry the whole bur-

den of being brave.

"I got myself into this," she said with bravado. "You told me to keep out. Well, we might do something to spend a pleasant evening. What's this book? If Scrymgeor's been keeping a diary, it might be entertaining." She pulled over the volume, a thin, black-bound oblong, that lay between the candlesticks, and opened it at random. Then her careless voice broke and recovered on a shriek. "Look! Look!"

On the first leaf was written in a hand both of them knew: "Andrew Crothers!"

Even then Johnny could not accept the truth.

"It's his notebook," he said stupidly. "When Scrymgeor robbed him he took that along with the bonds and brought it here."

Janet shook her head stiffly.

"No!" she said in a shivery whisper.
"No, Scrymgeor didn't bring it here."

Without further comment she made room for him on the bench, and together they read the diary of Andrew Crothers.

CHAPTER XIII.

I have never before experienced any difficulty in keeping my affairs to myself. Reserve has been second nature to me. Certain circumstances in my early life probably had their effect in intensifying a constitutional trait.

Therefore, to find myself sitting at this table, writing out the most damaging facts about myself that a man could well record, strikes me as one of my most disturbing symptoms. It is only a symptom, however, of my shaken physical condition. The life that I have been leading for nearly three weeks, the confinement, the loneliness, the continual danger of being seen when I have been obliged to go out to obtain foodall this might reasonably have its effect upon even so stable a mind as mine. Besides this, there has been a return of the physical ailment concerning which I some time ago consulted my physician. I am, I am afraid, a very ill man. Fortunately, I was carrying in my pocket a box of the tablets he prescribed, but they seem to be losing their efficacy. I may be driven out, before long, for medical aid.

This, however, is not a deathbed confession. I am not so badly off as that, and I have every intention of destroying this record as soon as it is completed.

I am writing it simply as an attempt to get rid of the thing, as a safety valve. Confession, they say, is good for the soul, and confession to a sheet of paper is better than nothing. It may, at least, help to unload the mind, to disperse that hard lump of memory which annoys me. Fixed ideas are generated by such lumps.

Annoyance, rather than remorse, is what I feel. Having trained myself to look facts in the face, I am reasonably sure that I could, had circumstances permitted it, have gone back and taken up my life where I left it, and lived it through, practically untroubled by Scrymgeor's death. It is annoyance that I feel—annoyance at having the whole fabric of my existence torn to pieces. To be forced to take refuge, like a rat, in my hole, to pay for my food, even by the strain of slinking out to steal it from my own house, causes me intense irritation and resentment.

To-day I had to accept a further risk. The Goldie woman having providentially taken me for a ghost, I issued a peremptory order against letting the place to strangers. To be obliged to learn the customs and hours of a new household would add immeasurably to my living problems. I overcame the difficulties of a resemblance to my handwriting by forming the words with a pen held between my toes. The result was remarkably successful, and unique.

I am writing on and on, without coming to the real crux. When I set out for Xanadu with Scrymgeor, that Saturday afternoon, nothing was further from my mind than violence. Indeed, I was absorbed in other thoughts. There is no necessity to dilate upon the subject of my marriage. It had proved to be a mistake, in every way, and I had, at last, permitted myself to face that fact, also. The heart knoweth its own bitterness.

I was, as I said, so sunk in my gloomy reverie that I was practically

oblivious to my surroundings. It was with a sensation of surprise that I was aroused by the stopping of the car. We were on the river road, or, rather, we had left the road and had turned aside where a growth of trees and underbrush formed a screen. Taking for granted that he had turned aside to remedy some trouble with the car, I said nothing until Scrymgeor leaned over the back of the front seat and faced me.

"And now, sir," he said, "you'll save trouble by handing over those bonds."

As I remember, I kept my presence of mind and was conscious of no particular fear, even when I saw that he held an automatic in his hand. Men do not care to shoot, except in the last extremity, and I counted on striking some sort of a bargain with him, and then have him hunted down by the police. At my first conciliatory words he cut the ground from under my feet by informing me that he hadn't been in my employ ten years for nothing. He knew a lot. He knew of this room, having tracked me to it once when I supposed myself alone in the house. He knew my secret.

Let me write of that as briefly as possible. It is a thing of which I have trained myself not to think, against which my mind has built up a wall where the memory stops unless some strong association pushes it over. One can, by consistent determination, create a blind spot on the mental retina. I had done this. I had done more. I had made the one dishonest act of my life the cause for greater honesty, finer scrupulousness. No man has a cleaner business record than I have. No man obeys the law more carefully, even when the law is an ass.

My father was twice married. With my half-sister, who was much younger then myself, neither my sister Agnes nor I ever got on. She disliked me particularly, and it is not too much to say that I hated her. It was more by the prompting of that hate, than by avarice, that I withheld from my accounting of my father's estate some securities which should have gone to her share. They made all the difference to me, in a business way, between success and failure, but I should not have vielded to the temptation, except for the long habit of regarding her as a natural enemy, and the knowledge that she had more than once wronged me, by leading our father to misjudge my conduct. In consequence, he deprived me of much of my fair portion of his property. To equalize matters appeared to me no more than an act of wild justice. Later I have come to regard it as the indefensible robbery which it was. It was easy for me to manage the affair, because the only other heir, my sister Agnes, Roderick's mother, was singularly ignorant on money matters. She received her full share.

Having set out to be candid with myself. I may as well confess that for years my desire has been to make up to my half-sister-still my enemy-for the injustice. The trouble has been that I could discover no way of doing so which would not lead her to suspect and investigate. I knew her; she would be merciless. I have no idea where she may be living at present. She married a doctor named Martinez and went with him to Argentina. The lawyers can, no doubt, find her. Our last interview was an unrestrained quarrel, over money, during which we mutually insulted each other past forgiveness.

With a care which may seem fanciful, I have kept an accurate record of the profits which might fairly be traced to those investments of the money which should have been hers. Of late I have converted these profits into non-taxable bonds, and deposited them, along with the original principal, in the safe in this room. With them I placed an account of these transactions, including a statement of how they had originated. My

intention was that after my death these securities should be turned over to my half-sister. I still hope to think of some manner in which this could be done without injuring my reputation.

The mistake I made was in leaving the statement outside the safe, on the last occasion when I was rearranging its contents. Scrymgeor had this paper in his possession and showed it to me insolently, again demanding the bonds. I managed to snatch the paper out of his hands. He threw himself on me and we struggled. As the back of the seat was between us I managed to keep his hands from my throat. I do not think he wished to use his pistol, and I have no idea in the world what caused it to go off. The explosion came with no consciousness on my part of having touched the weapon. Scrymgeor collapsed, falling back and across the front seat of the car. Death must have come instantly.

My first impulse was to drive to the nearest town, not for assistance, because the man was certainly dead, but to report the accident to the authorities. One consideration stopped me. Scrymgeor had said to me: "And don't suppose that I'm the only one that knows. I've taken the precaution of telling a pal. If anything happens to me, he's on the job, and he'd croak you as quick as that!"

The pal, whoever he was, would undoubtedly suppose that I had killed Scrymgeor to silence him and save myself from blackmail. He might either take up the affair and make my life a burden, or he might kill me out of revenge, or he might tell all he knew to the police, from the same motive. How would they regard my motives? For the first time, a panic assailed my mind. Was it likely that I, rather a frail, elderly man, could have overcome Scrymgeor, who was younger and stronger, in a fair fight, especially if he had been armed? Wouldn't it look

more probable that I had murdered an old and trustful servant, one with a good reputation for honesty, in order to shut his mouth?

At all events, that is the way it looked to me.

If I did not report the accident, however, what was I to do with the body? This puzzle, I believe, prevents many murders from being perpetrated. And, at this point, I received a beautiful illustration of how the devil takes care of his own.

Although it was fairly dark, I perceived a launch on the river, evidently making for the shore. Having no desire to be intruded on, I managed to push Scrymgeor's body into the corner of the front seat, and, having arranged a rug to protect me from the blood which had seeped from his chest, I took the wheel and started the car. I hoped to get around the curve of shrubbery, and regain the road, before being caught up with. Suddenly there were shouts behind me. I drove on. A pistol cracked and something whistled past my head. I stopped, fortunately, where there was a pocket of deep shadow, and before the men came up I had slipped out of the car and was hidden under the bushes. As my future plans were already taking shape, I took with me a suit case which, as I had noticed, Scrymgeor had been carrying in front, expecting, no doubt, to spend the night at Xanadu with me.

There were two men, and from their conversation I learned several interesting facts. In the first place, they did not miss me, because they had noticed only one man in the car, Scrymgeor's body having slumped down into the bottom. Secondly, they had mistaken the car for one which was to have met them at this spot. I understood at once that I was having the honor of an encounter with members of the famous bootlegging fraternity. One of them had been sampling his wares, and insisted upon

explaining to his companion, over and over, that he had got rattled, and had jumped to the conclusion that the distributing agent, who was presumably leaving them in the lurch, had been double-crossing them, and had, therefore, fired to stop him, shooting really before he had thought. Certainly the discovery of a perfect stranger, whom he never doubted that he had hit and killed, completed the rattling process.

His companion had trouble in getting him away, and succeeded in making him go quietly only when he agreed to carry the body along with them in the launch, the intention being to sink it at sea. As the shooter feelingly and truthfully summed it up, the police kept on searching considerably longer, where there was a plugged body involved, than when there was only a smashed-up machine.

Before departing they proceeded to destroy as much evidence as possible by wrecking the car. Driving it to a high point over the shore, they got out and Whether they exploded sent it over. the tank, or whether this was an accident, I do not know, but I do know that the outburst of flame caused a great relaxation of tension inside my brain,

After the two men had gone-with Scrymgeor-I crawled out of my retreat, and before the flames died down I confided to them the hat and light overcoat which I had worn. Inside the suit case I had found, as I had hoped, a coat and cap which Scrymgeor generally used at Xanadu, when he helped Goldie in the garden. I put them on. And here I discovered the fastidious susceptibilities of which civilization makes us the victims. Quite the most distasteful detail of that horrible evening was the necessity of placing that worn, uncleanly cap on my clean head. However, I did it. Into those bushes had gone Andrew Crothers, but Alex Scrymgeor came out of them, walked, with his peculiar, lopsided step, to Monckton, and there boarded the train for Newark. I have reason to believe that he was recognized there, a fact which kept him from buying a ticket, preferring to pay a train conductor who had no associations with his personality,

as he had always gone by automobile. In Scrymgeor's suit case I found a post-office deposit book. This I used to clinch the trail. Then I left Newark by trolley, changed several times, confusing my course as much as I could, but moving in a circle which brought me back to Xanadu. For the last stage I bought a second-hand Ford at a sale, drove it into this neighborhood after dark, and abandoned it within a mile and a half of my own place. It was a risk, but as far as I know-and I have got hold of some of Goldie's discarded newspapers -the Ford has never been connected with my movements. When I bought it I had again changed my appearance, and looked, I believe, like a rather shabby. unnoticeable. middle-aged farmer. I was getting worn out; I couldn't keep up the flight any longer.

If I were a younger man, I might conjure up the resolution to give myself up and trust to clearing my character with the law. The simple truth is that it is not the law of which I am I do not care to encounter afraid. Scrymgeor's pal. The idea gets on my nerves. My state of health accounts for the frightful dreams which have been shaking me. I shall stick it out here for the present-if I can.

If this were a sensational story, the sort of thing you read, I should, no doubt, place here a string of dots and some moral reflections. The situation has been worked out along the familiar lines. The wheel has come full circle. My sins have found me out, and into the pit I dug for another I have fallen. All the old sayings have dropped into place. Sometimes, alone here, I have the terror of having been buried alive, of having gone down quick into the grave.

My food is exhausted, and, though the idea of eating anything has grown more and more distasteful, I must go on another raiding expedition. It takes more nerve each time.

God be merciful to me, a sinner! But, if I can entrap that pal of Scrymgeor's, God be merciful to him! I shall not be.

CHAPTER XIV.

When they had reached the end of this extraordinary document Janet shut the book with a touch so compassionate that she might have been covering the face of the dead.

"Poor Cousin Andrew!" she said softly. "I'm sure that he didn't see me. He's always been so nice to me." Then she struck the volume suddenly with her fist. "But he did see you! I can't understand it."

"I understand it only too well," Johnny answered. "He took me for Scrymgeor's confederate, the man who was prepared to kill him, the man who, I believe, doesn't exist at all. Scrymgeor invented him as a safeguard. It's the same motive I ascribed to Scrymgeor. Having committed one crime, he had to commit another to hide the first. Somehow, I think he knows more about how that automatic went off then he claims to know-thought it was probably an accident. There's no doubt that he's living in terror. And to think that I hesitated before telling Major Laurel what Johnson told me! You remember Johnson?"

She nodded. Johnson, in a way, had introduced them.

"As soon as he told me that two of the crowd had killed a man unintentionally, and wrecked a car on that road, I suspected the truth, except that I supposed the dead man to be Mr. Crothers. Thanks to that story, Major Laurel may be able to keep them from arresting his wife."

"Olive?" cried Janet in dismay. "Are

they going to accuse Olive? How frightful, how-impossible!"

Johnny struck the book with the back of his hand.

"And to think that the whole story is in here, and we can't tell it!" Suddenly he hurled himself once more against the obdurate door. The candle waved as he passed, and a flicker of light like a derisive smile went over the stubborn wood.

She watched him with hands pressed together and parted lips until he gave up the useless task. He came back to his seat on the bench and mopped his face with his handkerchief, breathing heavily. He had put every ounce of strength into that effort.

"As I was saying," he observed after a moment, "one mistake leads to another. Do you remember the first time we met, and you told me how life thwarted our best impulses, until each slip made a worse one inevitable? Janet, I wish I could live long enough to show you that I'm not altogether rotten—just long enough to make good."

"You have made good." Tears sprung into her eyes. "The intention's everything, Johnny. The will to do right counts most."

"Well, if the will itself is there in working order, it's due to you," he said huskily. "You've been everything to me, from the beginning."

No human woman could have helped turning an amazed look on him.

"Yes, I know what I'm saying," he declared. "You thought it was some one else. Infatuation and love are not the same. And even that didn't carry me very far. Down in the bottom of my heart it was you, all the time, whether I knew it or not. Could I tell you so, now, if it wasn't true?"

She took his bruised hand and laid her cheek softly against it.

"Johnny, didn't you know that it was the only thing in my heart? I never meant to let you know this, but when I said that you were engaged to me-

"Yes, dearest love?"

"It was to save Olive, of course, butbesides that---"

"Yes?"

"I did hope-oh, I did hope, that

you'd get used to the idea!"

For a long time he held her close. There was so much to tell each other and so much that could not be told except wordlessly. There was the wild rebellion against all that they would miss, and the profound recognition that, for them, life was being concentrated, heaped into the fire of youth with an unsparing hand.

After a while she drew away from him in suddeny shyness. Idly she began turning over the leaves of the book

again.

"I've wondered why Cousin Andrew called the place Xanadu," she said absently. "I thought it was because of the 'gardens bright,' but now I see it was the underground meaning. You know—

"'Where Alph, the sacred river, ran, Through caverns measureless to man, Down to a sunless sea.'

It won't be so bad going down to a sunless sea—with you, Johnny. We've had more than some people have all

through their lives."

He felt a shiver go through her, and he braced himself to fight for both of them against the gathering horror that waited in the dim corners, ready to pounce. The strangest procession if images went through his brain. The walls themselves seemed creeping in, narrowing, pressing with low, centripetal force, to crush them into nothingness. His throat was closing. Angrily he shook his shoulders. That way madness lies—giving a loose to your dread.

You had to fill your mind with some other content. His mother—she would miss him; she did care for him, in her way. Fortunately, she could get on

without him, but she wouldn't be comfortable. And Janet-Janet's youth cut off here, to wilt like one of those imprisoned jonquils. He mustn't think of that. The inevitable was the inevitable. Death would have come some day. It was the denying of death, the refusing to cave in to the inescapable doom until the last possible fraction of time-that was what had brought the race up from the beast; that sort of heroic madness had placed it where it stood now. To die wasn't the worst that could happen. The worst was to lose your grip on your self-respect, to die like a coward, a gibbering idiot, mad with terror. That simply must not be.

To hold her attention a little longer

from reality, he asked:

"When did Mr. Crothers build the

house?"

"He didn't build it; he bought it, a good while ago. It's been a hobby, especially the grounds, though he remodeled the front, too, until you wouldn't have known it, adding the porch and cornice, and changing the approach. He bought it from a man named—a most eccentric name—what was it? Katzellenbogen. The place used to be named Bonn Hall, after the German university where he had been educated. He said he couldn't name it after himself."

"What?" shouted Johnny. He sprang to his feet. "Is there a town— a station, anyway—near, named Bruns-

wick?"

"The nearest station, where you must have got off to-day, used to be named that, but during the war the inhabitants got a patriotic wave, and changed it to Monckton, after one of the town officials who had distinguished himself."

"Glory be!" roared Johnny. And then before her terrified eyes he apparently went mad. He caught her in his arms and covered her face, her hands, her arms, with kisses. He laughed insanely. He went, with a dance step left by the centuries out of some wild, primitive corroboree, across the floor. From a hanging bracket he cleared a row of books with one sweep of his arm.

Then his manner became extraordinarily quiet and precise. By a peculiar twist of his wrist he detached the bracket from the wall, and disclosed behind it a construction like a keyboard, except that the keys were sunk into the surface. As a musician places his fingers on the piano, Johnny put the tips of his into these holes, made a tentative run up and down the silent scale, then, as nothing further happened, glanced over his shoulder and inquired:

"What were some of the songs they sang, about the beginning of the cen-

tury?"

She was too amazed to reply. His manner, instead of being insane, had taken on the abstracted consideration of a mechanic downfaced by a recalcitrant tool.

"Not the popular songs, but the sentimental melodies young ladies sang in drawing-rooms; not all classical but—classy. 'Dormez, ma belle?' He struck a few notes. "No! 'Good-by, Summer?' Not at all. My mother sang it; she said it was one of the best-known songs in the world." His gaze flashed round and settled on the flowers, clear white and gold in the candlelight. "'Du bist wie eine Blume!" he shouted. "She sang it in English. 'Thou art like a little flower,' but the music is the same."

As he struck the sunken keys, humming the air, the keyboard gave a click and sank, gratingly and unwillingly, into the wall.

"I hope to heaven the springs haven't rusted any," Johnny muttered. With deft movements of the hands and elbows, he worked some hidden combination. The side of the wall shivered, sank some three inches, and—stuck. Throwing himself on the projecting row

of lockers, Johnny tore away at them. It was useless. Then he felt through his pockets, produced a penknife, and with its largest blade went through an operation of the utmost delicacy between the top locker and the wall, twisting it in a complicated manner. After this he embraced the locker, heaving it upward with all his force, while the moisture dripped into his eyes from his frowning brow. After three trials, doleful creakings and scrapings issued from the lockers, and they parted from their moorings. Behind them yawned a moderate-sized, uninviting hole.

"Hasn't been opened for years," the magician informed his petrified audience, "if ever. We'd better test the air with a candle." In his impatience he tested it himself, leaning far into the dusty opening. "It's all right; there's a trickle of fresh draft coming down." With the same masterful exaltation which had marked all his movements, he took her in his arms. "You poor little angel! Don't you understand? We're saved! We're saved, Janet! This leads up into the cellar. The middle bar in the window in the left-hand corner comes out of its sockets. We can get out that way."

"How-do-you-know?" gibbered Janet. Her lips were stiff and her

fingers cold and clammy.

"Wait! No time to tell now. Let's get out of this devil's den first." He drew a long breath. "I was forgetting." Into his pocket he slipped the notebook. "Whether this is petty larceny or not, and, also, what I'm going to do with this, is still unknown to me, but it's coming along. Gee, I thought this was the end!" In his intolerable relief he broke into a shaky laugh. "I must say I'm quite pleased!"

Janet, still in a daze, caught up the

jonguils.

"They shan't stay here! They shan't!" she cried. She let him wrap her cape about her and steady her on

the flight of stairs that led upward from the hole in the wall. He took up the candlestick and paused to moralize while he located the matches.

"Queer! If he hadn't been so fond of flowers, I might never have remembered the song that freed that spring." The cosmic importance of trifles submerged him.

The air of the cellar, when they reached that heavenly spot, was like crystal in comparison with the sultriness below. They gulped it in, and Johnny finished his philosophical reflection.

"If it's fate that runs this world, it's a thinking fate; it plans; it's alive."

"It gave us to each other," murmured Janet. In the light of the candle her face had an ethereal, transparent glow. "It was worth going through, Johnny—the dread, the awfulness—to be sure that we do belong to each other. I don't know that I could ever have been quite sure that you'd loved me always, all the time." She stroked his sleeve. "You must have scraped all the cobwebs in the world off on you. No, I don't mind in the least. Can't we get upstairs without going outside?"

"Better not. We might meet some of the servants, and explanations are the last thing that appeals to me." He was groping in a corner, moving the candle up and down. "Yes, the bar still moves, according to schedule. Let me tear out some of this creeper, and we can slip through."

They did slip out, through the tangles of the vines, straight into a pool of light that streamed from the wide windows beside the porch. Johnny drew back quickly into the shade and stumbled over a huddled heap that lay just around the corner, partly concealed by the thick shrubbery.

"What's this?" he said sharply. Almost instantly he was sure. "Run to the house—call the major!" he ordered. "It's Mr. Crothers!"

"Not--" faltered the girl.

"Fate—that plans," Johnny uttered to his own awed heart. Aloud he answered: "I'm afraid so. That was a deathbed confession, after all."

CHAPTER XV.

As Roderick told himself, trying to get back into the state of mind which he found the best carapace against the thrusts of the world, it was the best thing that could have happened to old Andrew. He could not exactly say so to Olive, though when an old man shuffles off this mortal coil and leaves a lovely and well-provided-for widow, the occasion is one of those when we might be excusable for rejoicing with those who do rejoice, and weeping with those who weep.

When he pursued these reflections it was several evenings after Johnny had made his tragic discovery. Andrew Crothers had been laid to rest with his fathers with all the ceremony which his position demanded. After the funeral Roderick had brought back Olive to Xanadu, and, as there was no other woman relative near or dear enough to keep her company, Janet had rather reluctantly offered to return with them. It seemed cruel to leave Olive alone.

This being the case, it became inevitable that Johnny Betterton had been obliged to run from town, to bring his chief some important letters which had arrived at the office. The two men and Janet were on the long porch, where there came, through the door of the drawing-room and the vine-hung windows, a tenderly tempered orange glow, faint enough to make confidences comfortable.

As head of the family and executor of Andrew Crothers' will, Roderick had become the logical recipient of the notebook. Johnny had at once handed it over to him. By reason of his friendship with the great man before referred to, Major Laurel, who had at once made

known to him as much of the new evidence as was necessary, was confident that all of the story need not reach the public. That matter of the injustice done to Andrew's half-sister, for instance, was a family affair that ought never to go outside the family, and that could and would be set right by private agreement.

He puffed his cigar meditatively. The last few weeks had been a strenuous time with him. This evening the lull in his emotions was grateful, even if he had not yet got used to seeing the two young people together.

"And not minding me at all," he ob-

served ironically.

"The first thing to do," he said, breaking a pause, "is to ascertain the present whereabouts of the half-sister, Mrs. Martinez. I have not kept up with that branch."

"I can tell you that," Johnny put in, "but she has been married again. Martinez died thirty years ago."

"Ah? And her present name is-"

"Betterton."

The major bounded in his chair.

"Your mother?"

"Yes; I am the son of her second marriage. She had no communication with her family, as long as I remember. She felt that she had been treated so badly by them, that she could not even inform them of her return to this country. My father lived for years in New York. He was an architect." For a dramatic moment he stopped, then said: "He built this house."

"That," announced the major as one making a remarkable discovery, "was how you found the way out!" Janet chuckled gently. She had already been

told these secrets.

"Exactly. It was a firm secret, of course. You can't build a secret room for a man and then advertise the fact. When I was just a kid I found the plan, by accident. Dad was as proud as Punch of the way in which he had

smuggled it in among the chimneys, and he defied any man living to guess the combination behind the books. He had a little model of it. He was the sort of work-hound that loved to dabble in ornamental fountains and toys of that kind, just for love, after slaving all day at his office. And I solved it! Then he told me about the song; of course, old Katz would have picked out a sentimental German ditty. Mr. Crothers may not have known about this exit, at all; though, when he bought the house Katz must have told him the secret of the room. From what I've heard of him, it would be quite his style to keep a little bit of the puzzle to himself as his own private little joke." A note of pride came into Johnny's voice. "My father was too good an architect to make even a rabbit warren with only one exit."

"But you didn't recognize the house."

"All I saw of it had been absolutely changed. Even the names were different. Perhaps I ought to have guessed, but you must remember that my mind was considerably flustered, what with having Janet along."

The major was digesting these marvels.

"You recall the day when we had what I denominated—pointedly, I thought—a family council—to which you remained?"

Johnny smiled.

"Perfectly! I was in the family,

"That ought to have told me something," Roderick ruminated. "I'm growing old." He held out his hand. "Welcome, kinsman!"

"Thank you, sir!" Johnny got up. "I must be getting on, if I want to catch that train."

"Won't you come in and see-your Aunt Olive?"

"I think not," said Johnny very gently. "When she wants to see me I shall be very glad to come." He turned

said

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to Janet. "Why not walk to the gate with me?"

"The stars are beautiful," observed Roderick regretfully; "and plentiful. So are the dews and the bats. Run along, children, and admire the stars before they turn from platinum to pewter. Good night!"

It was a few minutes later that a silken murmur sounded behind his chair. Olive, very slender and pathetic, came in her trailing black draperies between the vases of flowering spiræa.

"Who was that speaking?" she asked.

"A cousin of mine," responded the major vaguely. He lay back in his chair and plunged his gaze into the heights

where, even from this point, plenty of stars could be perceived, twinkling gorgeously overhead.

"Oh, youth, youth!" apostrophized Roderick. "The only season of life in which one can make a fool of oneself over a woman, with dignity. I'm glad, at least, that I didn't waste mine while I was young and comely. It's the only time when everything hangs together and behaves harmoniously. The joys of youth are as abysmal as its sorrows. The kisses of youth are like its thoughts."

He sighed retrospectively.
"Long, long thoughts—"



Roderick.

A SONG FOR PILGRIMS

As any butterfly the air.

To sit beneath a golden dome
And pipe to lords and ladies there
Was all my thought and all my care;
My lifting heart was light as foam.

With song to spare and youth to spare,
I took the winding road to Rome.

For aught I know the road to Rome
Leads on through roses to the bay.
I had not danced a mile from home
When two blue eyes came up that way.
The piper had a kiss for pay—
O dew, O wine, O honeycomb!—
And all between a night and day
A poet lost the road to Rome.

Good pilgrims all, one word, I pray!
Wouldst write your names in fame her tome?
Then shun the eyes, blue, brown, or gray,
That meet ye on the road to Rome.
THEODOSIA GARRISON.



Salvage

By Izola Forrester

Author of "The White Moth,"
"A Café in Cairo," etc.

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CHAPTER I.

T seemed to Jack Willard, looking back at the amazing sequence of mishaps from the hour the San Salvador sailed out of New York harbor to the last inevitable tragedy, that fate had set her semaphores of danger, and no one had had the wit to read the signs.

He himself had been maddened at the delay when the boat was held at her dock to await the arrival of some important personage who was late. had walked the deck restlessly, fearing that, even now, at this late moment, he might be tripped up in his get-away. With every minute counting against him, he witnessed the arrival of Harley Jordan and his daughter, escorted by a running line of colored porters, all grinning from their excessive tips. caught a glimpse as she crossed the gangplank of René Jordan's face under her small black hat, white and perfect, and utterly indifferent to the commotion she was causing, as some delicate Greek bas-relief.

He was conscious of a curious sensation, a shot that had hit the bull's-eye, and the bell had rung within him, all because of the sweeping, impersonal glance from a girl's uplifted eyes. He damned himself for a sentimental fool, and walked away as the boat moved out into the river.

Another thing that worried him was his suspicion that he was being followed, that a certain man on the boat was there to watch him. He had caught his eye when he moved away from the rail, had known instinctively, that while he himself had been staring down at the Jordan party this man had stood a few feet away, getting the full effect of his interest in them. Indeed, a half smile of easy-going contempt had seemed to cross his lips as Willard moved away. Yet, later on, as the passengers adjusted themselves to-the trip and shipboard environment, it appeared the man's interest had shifted, like his own, to René Jordan.

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That fourth morning out, when he came up on deck the weather caught his breath and choked him like the blast from an open furnace door. The air was a peculiar, sulphurous color, the sea smooth, but running in long, oily waves the hue of ginger. The sun was visible through a yellow haze; ridiculously small it seemed. Somebody had remarked at that it was earthquake breakfast weather. There would be danger from hurricanes and possible tidal waves. A planter from the Isle of Pines started to explain the theory of seaquakes.

"It looks very peculiar—very," Harley Jordan remarked, with the casual. self-satisfied air that seemed habitual to him. "I happened to be visiting the Duke d'Alvarez a year ago in Sardinia. The air was perfectly like it is this morning, molten and oppressive. Before noon Ætna was erupting. You were at your aunt's villa, René, above Naples, and left for Paris, you remember?"

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The girl opposite him raised languid lashes without replying. It was not necessary. Jordan always lost himself in a maze of conversational eloquence. She rose and excused herself as he began an argument with the planter and an ex-consul, moving with the quick, nonchalant gracefulness of a boy down the long dining salon and out on deck, the glances of two men following her, Jack Willard and Maurice Dysart. avoided the last, her eyes evading his searching glance, but it seemed to Willard as if for the fraction of a moment her gaze met his own as she neared his isolated table at the far corner of the dining room near the arched doorway which led outside.

There was something menacing in the look which Dysart gave him after she had gone. Four days at sea had shifted their positions as if fate were playing a game of chance with them. Willard was positive he himself was not the object of the other man's interest. From the first day Dysart had been fascinated by the beauty and remoteness of René Jordan. She was that type of girl, Willard's own experience warned him. A firebrand to the imagination. Slim, amazingly fragile appearing, trained to the last degree of perfection mentally and physically, she was a rare and exquisite product of wealth and the moment. He had seen a painting once of Isolde by an Irish artist that reminded him of her-redgold hair in close-curling plaits about her small head, the white, eager face strained seaward, wide, quieting eyes of the sea's own changing color that utterly belied the Rossetti lips with their curves of indifference and ennui.

Once on deck, the thought of her expelled conjecture over the weather. Willard caught himself watching restlessly for her appearance, as he had since the first day out. Something in her eyes, whenever their glances had met had held and baffled him. He could not define it to himself, but he imagined they

held a deliberate appeal, almost a demand upon him, that he was a fool and coward not to answer.

Still, he demanded of himself savagely, had he not gone through enough the past two weeks, to satisfy the urge in his own nature to leap to the defense of any woman who called on him for help? He had learned a lesson that would leave him scarred for life in honor and self-respect. He was crazy to think René Jordan needed any one's help, or that she had singled himself out as a knight errant. Her father was a millionaire whose photograph appeared regularly in all the pictorial supplements as sportsman or promoter. She had no mother. The two kept up various establishments at Newport, Long Island, and New York, and moved picturesquely wherever society foregathered, with the press conducting a fanfare of approval every time they stirred.

She was seclusive in her ways on board ship, he noticed. There were other women passengers—South Americans, a consul's wife, two attractive young English girls returning to their parents in Buenos Aires—plenty for her to find companionship with. Instead, she kept to herself, aloof and disinterested where her father trod the deck of the San Salvador, as if it had been his

private vacht.

Willard found it hard to analyze his antagonism to Harley Jordan. He was the usual type of successful, middle-aged American—large, handsome, affable. rather distinguished, decidedly selfsatisfied. Captain Aguares made a point of extending privileges to him. crew seemed to know him as a frequent passenger on the boat, and catered to his comfort and amusement. Willard, he had a furtive, restless eye, a smile too fixed to be quite spontaneous, a habit of acquiescing in an absentminded way that was insincere. Once in the smoking room two nights out, he had been standing talking with several men, hands plunged deep in his pockets, contented and self-conscious of his own munificent personality, when Maurice Dysart had strolled in off deck, crossed to the cigar stand, and lounged there, smoking idly.

Jordan had observed him with a keen, speculative eye, striving to place the man's face in his memory. When Dysart went out Jordan had called over an understeward and had asked who the man was.

"His name is Dysart, sir," Nevins answered; "Maurice Dysart. First trip down the east coast, so he says, sir, but he knows the zone and has interests in Chili. Wool concessions, I believe, sir," he concluded.

"I don't like him, but his face is familiar."

"Quite right, sir," agreed Nevins pleasantly. "Uses too much jasmine perfume, I'd say, and wears too much jewelry. Questionable good taste, sir."

"Find out all you can about him, and let me know," Jordan said casually. "You run across queer birds flying south, eh, Nevins?"

"Rather, sir!" Nevins smiled. A short while after he appeared on deck, glancing until he located Dysart. He stood up forward, leaning over the rail, looking out at the saffron-colored sea. He was the Continental type, a composite of the Latin and the Nordic, with the suavity and mobility of the former and the coldblooded matter-of-factness of the northerner. Nevins had seen him lose over three thousand dollars at stud poker without a change of expression, and a moment later call down a waiter over a mistake of a few cents in his bar check. He barely glanced at the understeward now when he passed by him, but when Nevins paused beside Willard's chair he watched them through halfclosed evelids.

"Nothing you'd fancy, is there, sir? They've picked up some interesting bits on the radio, shocks in the islands here and there. Two wrecks from the hurri-

"Make it cheerful!" Willard cut in.
"How long will this last, do you think?
Do you get it this way often down here?"

"Well, we do and we don't, sir. It's just as you happen to run into it and the season of the year." Nevins was watching the tall, slender figure standing over by the forward rail. "There's no danger whatever; none at all, sir. You don't feel like a nice cool drink, I suppose?"

"No, let me alone." Willard pulled his cap lower over his eyes to shut out the glare of the yellow sea and sky. He tried to make his mind a blank, to rest his tortured, overstrained nerves, to exclude all personalities. "Or—wait a minute, Nevins. Just why does this fellow Jordan make this dash so often? Not for his health, is it?" He watched Nevins' reaction to his question.

"He's a sort of financial go-between, sir; a confidential international negotiator of loans. That is, he goes and looks a country over, like, and, if he says they're sound, they get enough money from the States to tide them over, as it were."

"Humph! fine ballast for any boat!" Alone, Willard found himself wondering introspectively, why he should feel such a distinct dislike of Harley Jordan. It was the man's ostentation that annoyed him, he decided; his bland patronizing of every one. Queer that this silent, thoroughbred girl was his daugh-Her face haunted his thoughts, ter. returning again and again as he sought to crush his growing interest in her. Out of the chaos of the past two weeks, it irritated and startled him to find himself susceptible to René's unusual beauty. He checked his racing thoughts now, seeing her step from the forward cabin out on deck. She did not seem nervous or excited like the other women passengers. He noticed she held a book in one hand, her finger marking where she had been reading.

There was a sudden crowding to the other side of the boat by the passengers to watch some dead porpoises float by, their pale, uncouth lengths upturned to the sky, shell pink and flounder green. Somebody remarked that, whatever it had been which had finished them up so neatly, it was all over, anyway.

René did not join the others. She did not seem to notice either Willard or Dysart as she strolled forward leisurely, her eyes watching the strangely colored sea. As she passed the figure by the rail a white linen handkerchief fell from the cuff of her white silk blouse where she had tucked it. Dysart saw it and picked it up, following her up forward under the green-and-white awning.

"Thanks!" she said. "Yes, it is mine."

There was a cool dismissal in her tone and manner, but he chose to disregard it.

"You don't seem to be alarmed, Miss Iordan."

She gave him a quick side glance, incredulous, as if she was amazed at his daring to speak to her, resenting the easy assurance of his address, the open admiration of his eyes.

"There is no real danger," she returned.

"No? The last radio reports tell of quakes in the islands. Those dead bodies mean the sea has had its share. Aguares was explaining just now the origin of volcanic islands, the unexpected upheaval of the ocean floor after one of these seaquakes. The sailors are afraid of a tidal wave. Would you be as indifferent, I wonder, if you knew we were all going to be plunged into eternity presently?"

She shrugged her slim shoulders without answering, moved away from him deliberately, and stood leaning on the rail. Letting her fingers unclasp, she dropped the crumpled square of white into the waves. Dysart's dark eyes narrowed cynically.

"Is it an invitation for me to recover it again? I do not—"

"Let me alone, please." Her tone was clear and peremptory. "I don't care to talk with you."

"But you will talk with me," Dysart insisted. "You will be most sweet and charming to me long before we land at Buenos Aires. You are a girl of rare good sense and intuition, Miss Jordan. It is your good fortune that my interest in you protects your father."

She looked at him with suspicious resentment.

"My father?" she repeated. "Would you dare to tell him this? Why do you come to me?"

"I have told you why." He smiled at her. "You interest me greatly, mademoiselle."

Willard had risen, watching the encounter, and seeing the look of annoyance on René's white face. He strolled over to where they stood, Dysart's face a study in utter indifference as he recognized him. There was not a word spoken for the moment, yet it seemed to René as if she had been offered protection and understanding. She gave him a quick, grateful glance, and turned away from them, hurrying back into the cabin. Dysart smoked musingly, waiting for Willard to take the offensive. Finally he said, with deliberate meaning and provocation:

"Mademoiselle is capricious. She will know only those whom she will know."

"Listen here!" Willard's tone had an arresting edge of steel. "I don't know who you are and I don't care. I've happened to see you annoy Miss Jordan. Don't do it again, or I shall throw you over to join the porpoises. It just happens, that, at this moment, my life isn't worth a burned match to me, so it wouldn't matter if we went together." He pulled his cap over his eyes and went on.

CHAPTER II.

After luncheon Willard settled himself again in his favorite chair on deck, shutting his eyes to everything that made up the chimera called life, the evanescent, inconsequential business of people trying to establish a valid excuse for their own existence.

He said this savagely to himself after witnessing the varied reactions of the passengers to the threatened danger about them. Jordan was more affable than ever. With the planter and the two other New Yorkers, he retired to the coolest corner of the smoking room and resumed the card game interrupted by luncheon.

Willard found himself watching impatiently for René, but she remained secluded in her own suite. Nevins had explained that Mr. Harley Jordan always reserved the cabin de luxe for himself when he sailed south.

The San Salvador continued on her course through the strange, molten sea with stolid indifference, it seemed. There was a curious, tacit conspiracy of silence among her passengers. The note of gayety and sociability was pitched high, as if in challenge to the tension of fear which held their nerves taut and waiting.

With the waning afternoon the red sun seemed to dwindle in size until it shone like a distant danger signal through a haze of amber like a vast penumbra. There was dancing in the forward salon. The latest musical numbers tumbled recklessly from the phonograph. The older men had gathered around the radio operator up in his room, keen after reports from other steamers caught in the same zone.

Jordan rose finally, a winner as usual, in high good humor. He lighted a long Havana stogy and went out on deck to look for René. Failing to find her in sight, he was about to make the round of the deck when Maurice Dysart paused

in front of him with a direct, half-smiling intent in his lean, handsome face.

"You have made this trip often, Mr. Jordan, I am told. You do not consider these conditions dangerous, no?"

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"Not in the slightest," Jordan answered somewhat pompously. "Radio reports show slight shocks in some of the islands, but that is usual at this time of the year—all sorts of disturbances. We weathered the hurricane and will be out of this in a few hours. Bound for South America, aren't you?" He eyed the dapper, nonchalant figure.

"I have interests there. My very good friend, Baron Fessenden, assured me it was advisable that we meet."

"Fessenden?" Jordan's plump, cleanshaven face deepened in color. "I don't recall the name."

Dysart knocked the long ash from the tip of his cigarette, pointing his arched, black eyebrows at the imperturbable face before him.

"We were very good friends," he repeated. "He is dead. He was murdered in Saigon two weeks ago on his way to Japan."

"You don't say so! Shocking!" The relief in Jordan's tone was palpable. "Any clew to the man who did it?"

"It was not a man." Dysart vouchsafed nothing further. His tone was even and pleasant. "Shall we sit over yonder and talk of South America?"

"Sorry, I haven't time now, old man." Jordan's manner had changed. He was cheerful, brusque, self-confident again, where he had been on guard. "Just going down to dress for dinner and get a little nap beforehand. See you another time."

Dysart did not stir, but watched him with steady gaze.

"You need not be afraid," he said quietly. "This is my first trip across. I am not known on this side, and Fessenden is gone. It is concerning your daughter I wish to speak with you. She is very beautiful—"

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"I haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about," Jordan interposed harshly. "Kindly leave my

daughter out of it."

"When I came on this boat four days ago," pursued Dysart evenly, "I fully intended killing you before we reached Buenos Aires. That is, unless the affair developed otherwise. You have brought with you the thing I came from Paris to get for myself. You understand me now? I meant to take that from you, if I had to kill you. You tricked and defrauded Fessenden, but you will never do so with me. I make a bargain with you. René attracts me greatly. You will introduce me to her, and will advise her that I am a most proper person for her to be friends with."

Jordan's manner was bland and contemptuous. Hands in his pockets, he looked the Frenchman over with sus-

picion but no fear.

"I don't know what your game is," he said between set teeth, in the tone he used to those he judged his inferiors. "I do not introduce my daughter to men of your type. I know quite well your Baron Fessenden, and that he was wanted by the police of two continents. You cannot tie me up with men of that stamp through blackmail or any threats. If you annoy me further, I shall turn you over to Captain Aguares."

"Then I shall be compelled to explain to him why you take these little pleasure trips to South America, and, if he doubts, we will prove it when we land

in Buenos Aires."

He paused. Wrapped in a gray cape over her thin dinner gown, René came toward them, looking for her father. She did not recognize Dysart until he turned around, and she flashed a look of quick, half-indignant inquiry at her father.

Dysart said nothing—merely watched Jordan. And in that instant the latter made his decision—one based on all that was best in his nature and character, all that was fundamentally real. He placed his arm around René's slim waist, and walked back with her to the entrance to the upper cabin.

Once in their own suite, however, he suffered a momentary collapse. Sinking back in an armchair, he lay with closed eyes, the moisture glistening on his forehead, his hands clenched tightly.

"Dear, what is it?" René begged.
"Tell me! Shall I call a doctor?"

He checked her with uplifted palm as she started to press the electric bell.

"Let me alone just a moment! I'll be all right," he assured her huskily. "This air chokes me—rotten—sulphurous. Glad when we get south of Trinidad." He opened his eyes wide and stared at her as she knelt beside his chair, something prophetically foreboding in his expression. "I wish that I'd left you behind, René! Love your old dad, don't you? I've not been a bad one to you, have I?"

"You've been the dearest, most wonderful father a girl ever had!" she exclaimed passionately. "Can't I do some-

thing to help you?"

"Listen! There's some one outside that door." He rose and moved noise-lessly over to the door, flung it wide open, and found nothing in the passageway. When he closed it he turned the catch. "Go in yonder and bring me my black traveling bag under the head of the bed."

Thinking he wanted to get some heart tablets that he carried with him while traveling, she obeyed, and went into the inner room. A knock came on the outer door, with Nevins' voice speaking eagerly:

"Miss Jordan, are you there? Nevins speaking, miss. You'd better go up on deck. Captain's orders."

Jordan opened the door.

"What the devil do you mean?" he asked querulously.

"I don't quite know myself, sir,"

Nevins answered, halfway down the passageway. "We appear to be running into something-possibly a tidal wave.

Better hurry."

Jordan took the walrus bag from René's hand and opened it, fumbling about until he found a small automatic revolver in a black leather case. stood for a moment in deep thought; strode back to where his steamer trunk stood and knelt to unlock it.

"I wonder just what one had better take in case of shipwreck." René spoke half nervously, half laughingly, standing before the dressing table. Her comb and mirror she slipped into a velvet handbag. A small, locked, leather case of jewels from her trunk. She filled the handbag with odds and ends-handkerchiefs, cigarettes, a vanity case, a pearl-rimmed medallion of her mother, matches. Suddenly she saw her father behind her in the mirror's reflection. He held in his hands, outstretched to let it fall over her head, a necklace of diamonds. And, even while she looked, two hands reached out of the shadows behind his figure and snatched the necklace from his hands.

Quick as lightning, Jordan drew the revolver and fired point-blank. Dysart caught at the door frame, cursing under his breath as the bullet smashed through his collar bone. Before he could recover himself Jordan had thrown himself upon him. René found herself awakening into a new personality. She was not afraid. She wanted to fight, too, to get at this man who menaced her father's life, to beat him off as if he had been a wild, attacking beast. As the two staggered to the floor of the cabin Dysart was uppermost, his youth and strength telling against the older man's skill.

There came a terrific lurch of the ship, a rising higher and higher like a plunging horse, screams above screams from the deck, then a smashing downwards into what seemed to be an endless depth, the ship keeling over sidewise until they were all thrown to the floor.

Dysart freed himself first, staggering to his feet.

"We're damned fools!" he said quickly. "We'll all be drowned like rats in here. René!"

"Don't you touch me, you-you thief!" She stood up, her back against the swaying, paneled wall, her eyes wide

with horror and scorn.

"Thief?" Dysart laughed. "My dear girl, there lies the master jewel thief of America-your father. I do not pretend to compete with him-not over here. You despise me. You will not be friends with me, no? I will tell you now that all your money comes from this sort of thing." He held the diamond necklace in the air. "That is worth four hundred thousand dollars. last he stole was a string of black pearls -three hundred thousand. Last year it was the Farnsworth diamond, priceless since it was stolen from the Shah of Persia and sold in Amsterdam. Your society game is all a blind. You yourself-why were you brought on this trip? To shield him from suspicion. Ask him if I am not telling you the truth. Look at his face! Ah, you had Fessenden killed to shut his mouth, but he had already spoken."

The pounding of the engines had ceased. Beneath them, from the heart of the ocean, there came a deep, reverberant rumbling like submarine, thunder. It seemed to grow in volume, to surround the ship in sea and air. Even the running feet on the decks were deadened by it. Only a brief, uplifted shriek of agony came once or twice. For the instant Dysart hesitated. was a choice between the necklace and the girl-which he should save. Iordan had risen and, breathing heavily, he swaved from side to side like an attacking gorilla, his eyes red and bloodshot. He threw himself forward to snatch at the necklace and Dysart let him impale himself on the thin, narrow-bladed knife, which he held pointing upward. The American sank heavily forward to the floor, but his arms were clasped like steel bands around Dysart's knees. With the desperation of death he held him fast, the Frenchman slashing madly at the gripping muscles. René tried to reach her father to save him, when she felt herself lifted bodily in some one's arms as the lights of the ship went out.

CHAPTER III.

"Don't be afraid," Willard told her. "They're lowering the boats."

"But I don't want to go!" She struggled to free herself from his arms. "That man is killing my father, I tell

you. Let me go!"

He set his teeth, holding her fast, making his way through the darkness the same way he had come after her. Nevins was waiting for him on deck. There was just time, he said. They were filling the last boat. The decks seemed deserted and awash where the tidal wave had overwhelmed everything. Striving to keep his footing with the burden he carried, Willard headed for the port side where a confused clamor of voices mingled with the strange, resurgant roar of the sea.

"Please, please, take me back! Let me go!" René pleaded pitifully. "You don't understand. I can't leave him! That man is killing him. Don't make

me go!"

"Find her a seat, Nevins," Willard ordered, but as the understeward stepped to the side of the lifeboat he was struck aside by a man, and sent staggering to his knees. The man threw himself into the boat as it was being lowered from its davits. It halted half-way down; one rope caught overhead. The forward end dropped downward, spilling the occupants into the sea. The steamer was settled like a wounded moose, forward, lower and lower to the

water's edge. The deck behind was swept by the long rollers as the Atlantic washed over it. Willard stood waiting with the limp form of René over one arm. Nevins had recovered himself, and struggled to free the boat. Between them they sawed at the thick rope with pocket blades until it ripped with the weight of the sagging boat and gave way. The lifeboat dropped into the water, with Nevins holding it to the side of the dipping rail.

"In you go, sir! Careful with her!

There you are!"

"Come on!" Willard shouted back to nim. The understeward smiled cheer-

fully as he leaned on the rail.

"Sorry, sir! I think it's my ankle. I can't quite make it." The lifeboat drifted off from the sinking ship, caught on the swelling waves. Willard found a pair of oars, fitted them into the locks, and pulled desperately into the darkness, his mind keved to the highest nervous The voice of Nevins came tension. faintly to him, as if he were cheering or singing. The captain and radio operator were still on board-possibly more. Willard looked back at the San Salvador settling to her grave. There was much that was unorthodox about the scene, he thought. Where were the reaching, clutching hands of the drowning lifting about him from the waves?

The sea had subsided, and was running now in long, surging swells. thought of those two locked in a death grapple in Suite A, the cabin de luxe. Thoughts, rational, clear and concise, came to him, even while he knew that he was rowing with the last chance of escaping the vortex. It was part of fate's juggling, that he should be there alone with René Jordan, that it had been granted to him to save her from her father's death. Again, his mind derided and denied this. It had not been fate-nothing but his own nerve and strength that had turned the trick. He had not seen her on deck among the other women; had missed Dysart, also; and had taken a chance on reaching her in time. Nevins had told him she was still in her cabin. It was simple.

He paused, shipping his oars to drift a moment and stare back at the final picture of the steamer. It seemed as if some Titan hand had reached up from the sea depths and caught it from below, dragging it down with a rush. The ocean surface gave way to let it pass, and left a rushing maelstrom of troubled water where it had been.

It was merciful that René should be unconscious, he thought. Not a sound came from the surrounding darkness. He knew that eight boats had been launched, and seven had gotten away. He wondered if they could have been all engulfed in the second wave that had followed the first great one. The sea calmed down within the next hour, yet he dared not stop rowing. It was as much to save his own reason as anything, to feel that he was doing something to help; to get them as far away as possible from that vortex of death.

With the daylight, he saw the sea had resumed its natural color; the atmosphere had cleared considerably; but, looking back at the way he had traveled through the night, he was amazed to see what appeared to be the hulk of the steamer floating far off. He wakened René and together they watched it in strained silence. But with the increasing light they saw it was a reef lifting from the water like the fin of some mammoth sea monster. The waves, even from that distance, they could see were breakers.

"Looks like a volcanic island thrown up by the quake, unless we were off the course last night. It's queer we missed it when we left the ship. Probably struck a current flowing southeast."

"The end of it curves up like a sea horse's head," she said slowly. "It marks the place where the boat sank, doesn't it?"

"See if there is water in those casks, will you?" Willard caught the breaking note in her voice. She obeyed him without question. The water was stale and warm from the day they had left New York, but there was plenty for two days. She stared around the mother-of-pearl waste of ocean, one hand pressing back her tumbled hair.

"To you think they are—all gone?"

"I don't know. Probably some of the boats got away." He busied himself opening up a can of crackers. Thrown into the bottom of the stern-seat locker, he had found a hasty store of food tossed there at the last moment—barely enough to last them two days.

She turned her head to watch him, remembering how he had risked his own life to come down and find her. In the pale light his face looked young but austere. She was silent, the tragedy of her father's fate fading before the uncertainty of their own. How long could it last, she wondered—this futile rowing of one man against the ocean's surging power? As if he had caught the trend of her thoughts, he looked up.

"Do you know how to handle the tiller? I lashed it last night. I'm trying to head southeast, on a chance of hitting one of the islands toward the Windward Passage. We're in the course of the coast boats and ought to sight one any time."

She felt that he was trying to give her hope when there was none, but she unlashed the tiller and steered as he directed while he rested. He talked quietly, trying to keep her mind off her father's death. They would surely be picked up, or carried by the sea currents to some shore. A bottle tossed into the sea near Florida had turned up on a beach on the east coast of Barbadoes, she had heard.

"You don't have to tell me these things," she told him. "I am not at all afraid of death. I suppose it is really a toss up with equal chances."

"Hardly equal," he answered. He was foraging in his pockets, taking stock of everything he had saved. Several pockets of matches, a leather cigarette case nearly filled, a bill-fold with money -plenty of it, she saw, ten one-thousand-dollar bills, crisply new, folded into it snugly. She remembered vividly the last scene in her cabin, her father's amazing morale in the face of Dysart's attack, the diamond necklace that had glittered like ice in sunlight when he had swung it up over her head. Four hundred thousand dollars, Dysart had said it was worth. She tried to recall the other things he had accused Jordan of stealing.

"Did you save anything?" His voice startled her back to the present. She felt in the pockets of the silk sport coat she had been wearing on deck, and found nothing but a scarf and a powder compact. It was pitifully out of place now, the gold trinket with her monogram on its cover in Russian enamel. Somehow, it symbolized her own uselessness in such a situation.

Then she remembered putting things into a velvet hand bag—her jewels, a comb, a mirror, handkerchiefs. Her father had always been lavish in his gifts. There must be about fifty thousand dollars' worth of odds and ends, she thought—rings, a bandeau set with diamonds, a diamond pendant, a platinum bracelet set deep with diamonds, a pearl necklace and earrings. She still wore her wrist watch, a small octagon set in a black-leather strap.

"I think I must have been holding something in my hand when you lifted me—a black velvet bag containing jewelry and other things that I meant to save. Did you see it?"

He reached for his coat lying on the seat back of him where he had rolled it up for a pillow for her during the few hours she slept. The velvet bag was crushed into a side pocket. He tossed it over to her, and she took out the

cigarettes she had put in, the matches, and a small flash light.

"Here, take these," she said. "I never knew before how idiotically helpless you feel when somebody bursts in and tells you the boat is sinking. That was Nevins, wasn't it?"—with a sudden flash of memory. "Why didn't he come with us?"

Willard told her briefly, and found her staring back over the sea with the strained, puzzled look she had worn all night.

"I'm sorry I couldn't have saved your father, too."

She glanced at him gratefully.
"I was thinking about him. D

"I was thinking about him. Did you see—did you know that he was being killed by that man?"

"I saw that they were fighting. Try to forget it. There was no time to do anything except get you to the boats."

She was silent for some time, banished to reticence by his impersonal brevity. He stretched himself out to sleep while she stood watch. The sea as the sun rose subsided until it was like a mirror They had drifted for hours southward. The reef had long since mingled with the amethyst horizon haze. She sat with her hands on the tiller, itseless now, restling, wrapped in a numb sense of unreality. She was René Jordan. Never since her birth had she known anything but tenderness and luxury. Life had become monotonous from sheer ennui over too much wealth, too much having her own way, too-much nonresistance from life.

The seaquake and tidal wave had been more than natural phenomena to her. They had brought with them an upheaval of the forces which directed her own existence, had turned her father from Harley Jordan into a criminal, a man who belonged to the same lawless fraternity as Maurice Dysart. She drew in a deep breath and found Willard watching her through half-closed, dreamy eyes.

"Why did you ever come after me?" she demanded. "I think life is a million times worse than death. You don't know what you did to me, making me live."

He sat up, clasping his hands about his knees, his eyes filled with curiosity and compassion.

"I didn't see you among the other women. Nevins said you were in your cabin. And you were the only girl on board who had interested me."

"Heroism isn't very altruistic, is it?"
She smiled half bitterly. "Why had I interested you?" There was no invitation to sentiment in her tone; rather resentment.

"I saw that you were being shadowed and troubled by Dysart."

"I know. You helped me to get away from him on deck."

"Did he threaten you? Don't tell me if you'd rather not. I should have thrown him over to the porpoises then."

"He tried to make a bargain with me," she said slowly. "My father's safety for my friendship. Do you think they may have escaped, after all? There must have been life rafts aboard."

"The steamer sank while I watched it," he told her. "Try to sleep now while I watch. We'll have to divide up the day and night between us on sixhour stretches. That would be too long for you, though; three would be better," I think."

"But we will be picked up in a day or two." For the first time he saw doubt in her eyes. "You said we were in the course of the southbound steamers. Why"—she stared at him as if she were seeing him for the first time—"I don't even know your name."

"John Willard—Jack, usually." He smiled over at her. "At least, that is the name I chose for myself when I left New York. Direct and ordinary, without being common. It's very interesting, selecting a new name for yourself, and a new rôle. I had laid out my

future for years, providing for every emergency excepting seaquakes, tidal waves, and—you."

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She listened without anger. It seemed natural for him to speak to her so. When she had first seen him on the boat she had felt a peculiar confidence in him, an understanding that needed no words or conventionalities to make it teal. Among all of the men passengers, he had been the only one who had seemed of her own kind, the men she was accustomed to meeting abroad and in New York. Harley Jordan may have played his own secret game with fate and chance, but, so far as his daughter was concerned, she had been sheltered and brought up by his sister, with a winnowed list of friends that cut her off absolutely from undesirables.

"I know," she replied quietly. "I was in trouble, too, and just to know that you were there gave me a feeling of protection. Queer, wasn't it? And now, we're here together, a pair of dice for life and death to play with."

He glanced at her keenly. If she was to keep up her morale, she must cut sentiment, he thought grimly. No brooding or dreaming, no beckoning to fatalism. He tossed over a handful of the ship biscuit into her lap.

"Eat those, and afterwards you can help me rig up a sail. I want that silk cloak of yours. You can take my coat if you want it. If I can stick an oar up in that prow for a mast, and fasten a sail to it, it may blow us along—who knows? The gentleman on a raft uses his shirt, doesn't he?"

"He does not." She nibbled slowly at the edge of the biscuit. "That's for a signal. I don't believe you're experienced in shipwrecks."

"No?" His lips tightened in a twisted smile that she did not see. "You're wrong. I feel an affinity for any wreck. Go to sleep now, and don't watch me, or I won't work. You know, back in the dining room, I would for-

get to eat, just staring at you in the hope that you would look up."

"If we're not picked up by any boat" -she spoke after a long pause-"how long do you suppose we can live? I've always had a horribly vivid imagination over things like this-being buried alive, and cast away, and that sort of thing, vou know. I-I"-she laughed nervously-"I don't believe I quite understand the technique of dying gradually." She waited for an answer. "Pleasedon't go first, will you?"

He caught the tremor in her tone and turned quickly, but her face was buried in her hands as she sobbed for the first time-great, deep, dry sobs. He left the silk cloak crumpled on the seat beside him, and knelt beside her, encouraging her, pulling her back to a grip on her nerves. Her head lay back on his shoulder after she had exhausted herself. She was quiet, her eyes closed. He waited a long while before easing her into a comfortable position, so that she could sleep.

CHAPTER IV.

At the end of the third night Willard found himself baffled. There had been no sign of land or passing boats, not so much as a stain of smoke on the hazy horizon. So far as he could judge from the location of the sun and stars, they were not heading south, but had been caught in an ocean current that seemed to be bearing them northeast, This would carry them beyond the Antilles group out into the Atlantic. The hurricane and tidal wave had probably blown the San Salvador out of her course, and left them north of the Windward Passage.

He did not share his doubts with She had faced the situation the first day with courage and good fellowship, as if she were determined to crush her own grief back, and meet this new hazard with, at least, a fair spirit toward

him. When the third day dawned without a boat being sighted, the immediate peril they were in gripped her with its hopeless reality. She lapsed into long spells of silence, sitting at the stern of the boat, her chin on one palm, as she watched the amethyst borderland where sea and sky merged. She was not morose nor bitter. It was the fine, highgeared resistance she had shown at first that was giving way to resignation. Seventy-two hours of hunger and exposure were breaking her splendid morale.

Oddly enough, she never seemed to sense his fierce tenderness toward her. He had saved her from the sinking ship. It made him rage at his helplessness to keep her from dying of starvation or thirst in the open boat. The weather had kept in their favor, as if to make amends for the havoc it had spread. Except for the long underswell, the sea was almost calm. A hundred times his imagination pictured the days that lay ahead of them. He was the stronger. He would surely outlive her. He remembered reading once of desert castaways, where one had gnashed open a vein to prolong the other's life. He felt he could have gladly rendered up his own worthless existence, if it would have saved her.

He had committed one supreme act of folly, had smashed his own career without a thought of the consequences. He had evaded the law, had sought to escape from the intangible, pursuing accusation of his own conscience, from scenes in New York which would make him live over the horror of his crime daily. His death was a negligible, unimportant event, even to himself. There was a curious justice in fate tripping him up by his fleeting heels, and making him pay a life for a life.

But with René Jordan, he felt it was unethical in the unseen forces to throw her splendid, untried youth into the discard. She had the right of way, everything to live for. Personally, he felt that she was well rid of an undesirable parent in the death of Harley Jordan. She was his sole heiress, and could return to the States to enjoy fully his wealth.

That some element of mystery was entangled about the circumstances of Jordan's death struggle with Dysart, he had suspected but he had connected it up in his own mind, somehow, with the Frenchman's desire to know René. Evidently he had used leverage to gain his point, which had met with sudden and unexpected resistance from the American.

"If only one could submit!" René said suddenly, stretching her bare arms high in the sultry air. "I wish I could stop thinking. I've watched those waves go by until I could shriek at them to stop. It must be easier to be marooned on an island than to be like this, adrift in an open boat without a chance. And I'm terribly hungry. I suppose after the seventh or tenth day I won't feel like this. Why don't you say something?"

He smiled over at her, pulling with long, easy strokes at the oars. The makeshift sail from her silk cloak had been a failure through his inability to lash an oar in place to hold it. The action of rowing was a relief to his mind. At least, they were in motion, going somewhere, getting farther away from the scene of the tragedy.

"You're standing it wonderfully," he told her.

"But I'm not. I fight and rebel all the time against it. I don't fear death—it's not that—but I resent this slow torture. It might have taken us quickly, if it is inevitable. You're not afraid, are you? Isn't this a queer comradeship? We never thought back there on the ship when we looked at each other that we would die together, did we?"

"We're not going to die," he retorted 'doggedly. "Why don't you fight? Don't give up until you have to, We've

got water left in the casks. That's the main thing. You talk as if you wanted to die."

"You hate a quitter, don't you?" Her words were an unconscious thrust that got him, even with the admiration in her eyes.

"Hardly!" he said, his eyelids narrowing as he looked back at the blue sea they had crossed. "I'm one myself, that's the queer part. When that tidal wave hit us I happened to be running away, and it stopped me."

"Running away?" Her eyes questioned him quickly. "What had you done?"

"Well, I was a fugitive, in a way, not from the law so much as from my own conscience. I was suspected in a famous murder case. For lack of evidence I was exonerated by the coroner's jury, and I know I'm guilty. You know the air pockets that airplanes strike-dead spots where no currents can cross? They have found them in radio, too. I've got one of those in my life-a blank, a dead spot in my brain where I can't get any response, I can't remember But I know that I what happened. killed a certain man. I went after him to get him, and he was found dead,"

It was a vast relief to him to talk freely to some one. There was no horror or amazement in her eyes as she listened to him quietly. It seemed as if they had passed into a zone where they were beyond emotion.

"What else?" she asked.

"I had quarreled with him at his club. It was around one in the morning. They stopped us fighting there, and he went up to his apartment on Madison Avenue, but I followed him. When I asked him to hand over certain things he was holding he struck at me with his cane. We were standing in the hall, and I knocked him down."

"Did you kill him?" she asked briefly.
"Wouldn't that have been accidental
death through self-defense?"

"I don't know. I'm only sure I did it. I never waited to see whether he was dead or alive. I didn't care. His body was found the next morning by his Japanese valet. No witness had been present. No one had seen me come or go from the old-fashioned building. It was a private residence turned over into bachelor apartments. They found cigarette ashes in a brass tray, and stubs. The dead man never smoked. People told of our quarrel, and I was held and questioned, but they could not hold me on the mere fact that we had had words at the club that night."

"But you did kill him? You meant to when you were there?" she persisted.

"No, I did not. If he had done what I asked him to—given up these things I wanted—I would have left him alone. But, you see, I should have told all I knew about myself, helped the law out, but I sat there listening and thinking what a pack of fools they all were. They could have taken my finger prints from the balustrade. I remember running my hand over it when I passed upstairs. The ashes were not mine. I never smoke that brand. The Jap said his master imported them for a certain woman of his acquaintance."

"She might have killed him if you hadn't,"

He laughed shortly, bitterly.

"She kill a man? She loves herself better than anything on earth. She would never do anything discreditable, anything that could be found out. I think she was with him that afternoon. In fact, I know that she was,"

René watched him attentively, her wide, sea-gray eyes thoughtful and interested.

"You both loved her, didn't you?"

The color rushed thickly to his face and bared throat. He lifted his head quickly as if he had been struck on the point of the chin.

"No!"

"We agreed to tell the truth, didn't

we? What on earth does it matter now? You did love her, didn't you? What was she like? No, please tell me. It makes me forget all of this."

Willard waited, revolving the question in his own mind, amazed to find himself crazy to pour out the whole story to this girl, to relieve the high tension of

secrecy that bound him.

"She is the wife of a certain man who aims for high statesmanship. His private life is open to the public eye. He prides himself on its utter and complete irreproachability. She is eighteen years younger, and has two children—boys—away at school. I know!" He agreed to her unspoken criticism. "She craves glamour in her life, I think, color, the great border of gold and crimson that completes the rainbow. The man I killed—"

"What does she look like?" René checked him.

"Rather tall, black hair and eyes. She talks little. At a dinner you may find yourself lost in sheer joy of the curve of her throat and chin. Her skin is like the blond Tuscan women, cream toned, velvety. She paints her lips with tangerine red. Her voice is contralto. When she laughs—" He stopped short, lifting his face to the sky as if in pain. "Damn her!" he said slowly. "Damn her, I hate her shadow!"

René was silent, musing on her own poverty of emotional crises. She had never met any man who could so rouse her sleeping love sense, or even thrill her to an awakening understanding of herself. The stranger, who had happened to save her life, came nearest to it, and he was racking himself into an agonized frenzy over the memory of a woman whom he loved and hated. The humor of it appealed to her. Tooked back at him half pityingly. could not have been over twenty-eight or thirty. Nature had handicapped him with blue eyes and brown, curly hair that looked best rumpled, close, generous lips, and a chin cleft deep. When he tried to look tragic and somber, he had the exact expression of an indignant boy, furious at some imagined injustice. Yet he was powerfully built, tall, lean, athletic. She ran her glance over him and back to his angry eyes.

"Did she care for this man-I mean,

more than she did for you?"

"For Grant? She never cared for any one excepting herself, I tell you." His tone was harsh. He fumbled for a cigarette in his shirt pocket, and lighted it with fingers that shook. "She was absolutely stone cold, selfish. Grant knew So did I, and we both went on the rocks just the same and let her wreck He was more sure of her than I because he understood such women bet-He knew her one dread was scandal, and he held her letters over her. She came to me and complained about Grant's cruelty; said he was threatening to turn them over to her husband if she didn't go away with him-all the usual bunk a woman pulls-and I believed her. I went after him to get her letters, and killed him when he laughed at mie."

"Did you get the letters?" He stared back at her, hauled back to reality

by her quiet query.

"I never thought of them after I struck him. Nothing came out in the evidence. The police went through all he left. Perhaps he had already burned them, and was bluffing."

"Was her name brought into the

case?"

"No! Nobody knew about her, excepting Yamato, and he was loyal to Grant, of course. When I took the boat Monday——"

"Saturday," she corrected. "You're losing count. It's seven days since we

left New York."

"That's right, it was Saturday. I meant to just keep on going anywhere, and it wasn't because I had killed Grant Demarest. I had done more than that.

I had killed something in myself. At least, I missed something, I don't know what it was—faith in myself, perhaps, confidence. I felt disillusioned, licked, cheated. I was caught between two fires. If I gave myself up and told all that I knew, it involved her. She made that plain enough. She told me, if I dared expose her, or bring her name into the case with the police, she would take her own life."

"She believed that you did kill him,

then?"

"But it was true. I did. I had been drinking brandy—we both had at the club. There was a gash in his head where he was struck, falling backwards. He had a craze for collecting curios. There was one of those Japanese stone lanterns standing just inside the archway of the living room. I remember it had an orange-colored light burning in it. He hit that. They would have let me off with manslaughter, probably."

"You were a fool not to see it through." He met her clear, imper-

sonal gaze anxiously.

"Yes; it's been plain hell, this way. You know, I feel better to have told somebody the truth. The ancients had a special demon set to torment those who took human life. He's been on my left shoulder ever since I walked out of the coroner's office, free. This is like a last confession, isn't it? Have you any extreme unction to give a shrived soul?"

"I?" She shrugged slim shoulders. "If you had told me this the first day out. I should have been afraid to know Now, we are comrades, prison you. mates of conscience. You've told me your secret, and you say it makes it easier to go on. Dysart told me my father was the greatest jewel thief in in America. I didn't believe him. He told me that these South American trips were to reach a safe port where he could meet European confederates and pass along the jewels to them to be disposed of. All I can see in front of me, day or night, is the picture of the two of them in my cabin fighting to the death for the necklace. If we could see them this minute down under the sea, wouldn't it be a joke to the world -Harley Jordan and Maurice Dysart locked in a death grip? You know, I never realized before that men could give their lives for jewels. Dysart even told me that they only dealt in the richest loot. He named several great unsolved jewel mysteries, and said it was my father who had instigated and directed them. Two of the girls had been murdered by the men who robbed them. Isn't it ghastly? Do you wonder I can't sleep, that I don't care what happens now, whether we're picked up or not?"

She leaned forward, covering her face with her hands.

"It's worse when you're the guilty party," Willard said deliberately. "I assure you, it is very much worse. At least, you bring clean hands out of this rotten mess. You're not the one to blame, René."

It was the first time that he had called her by her name. He left his own seat and knelt beside her as she cried brokenly, nervously.

"Fight it off," he urged. "You know you can. Don't let it get you. You've got everything to live for."

She lifted her head presently, and moved away from his encircling arm. Out of the southeast the full moon was rising, its rays sending mysterious radiations of palpitant orange light over the iridescent sea. The night was warm, the boat drifting easily with the long, languorous movement of the current.

"You get some sleep," he told her.
"I'll watch till daybreak. Put this stuff
out of your mind. Listen—did you ever
hear this? I always think of it at night
on the ocean." He lighted a cigarette
and took his station in the prow, staring
off at the eastern sky, wondering in his

own heart whether death or the coast of Africa bounded its restless farthest shore. She had obeyed him, and lay on the improvised bed in the bottom of the boat, her head pillowed on one arm, her eyes closed as she heard his voice saying quietly, dreamily:

"Dawn is dim on the dark, soft water,
Soft and passionate, dark and sweet.
Love's own self was the deep sea's daughter,
Fair and flawless from head to feet;
Hailed of all when the world was golden,
Loved of lovers whose names beholden,
Thrill men's eyes as with light of olden
Days more glad than their flight was fleet.

"So they sang; but for men that love her, Souls that hear not her word in vain, Earth beside her and heaven above her Seem but shadows that wax and wane—"

The cigarette died out in his hand untouched. He thought she slept, when suddenly she spoke to him.

"Propinquity's deadly, isn't it? We're probably all set for the last act, and you're repeating romantic mid-Victorian verse to me, and I'm quite likely to fall on your neck and weep again at any time. What did you say your name was?" A slight pause.

"I didn't say," he returned laconically.

CHAPTER V.

During the night she slept quietly, better than at any other time since they had been adrift. It seemed to Willard when she awakened as if she were less worried and more hopeful. She watched him rigging the gray-silk cape again to an oar, and helped him lash the oar in place to one of the thwarts. With a rope tied to one end, it caught the morning breeze and filled out passably.

"Listen!" she said suddenly. "You've been part of the everyday life of New York, Have you heard of the Farnsworth diamond robbery?"

"Stolen at the dinner given by Mrs. Paul Berringer for Lord and Lady Suffern last January? Of course, I know about it." He looked up at her keenly. "You mean that Dysart was the thief?"

"Not Dysart. He was in Paris. It was the necklace father had in the cabin. Dysart told me it was worth four hundred thousand dollars. You see, there was a man named Baron Fessenden. He used to meet my father in Buenos Aires, and posed as a Danish explorer. He would take the stolen gems back to Europe with him and dispose of them. This man Dysart knew him after he and my father had quarreled and separated. That is how Dysart knew, you see. He said the baron was killed in Saigon recently."

"Don't believe the stuff he told you. Remember the Jap rule. When a person brings you information consider his motive before you give credence to him. He was framing your father to get you

in his power."

"No, it was true enough," she said without emotion. "I saw his face when this man told me. He never tried to deny it. You can't understand, of course. You've been through your own particular hell, but you've not had to stand by and watch the murder of the person you cared most for, helpless to save him."

"It's horrible that you should have seen it happen, but you are out of it, after all. You stand clear of any complicity. There's nothing on your conscience, no reason why you can't go back and take your life up again."

She looked ahead of her with wide,

dreaming eves.

"If you had not come when you did, I could have killed Dysart gladly. It makes me understand what you did. It's easier now that we've told each other, isn't it?"

"It was easier for me the first time I looked into your eyes," he answered. "You gave me courage and nerve. I was smashed when I came on the boat. You gave me faith. I could have knelt to you and claimed sanctuary in your

pity. And your spirit through this you're a valiant and beautiful comrade for any man to face death with, René."

Throughout the day she seemed calmer, but weak from lack of food. In face of her failing scrength, Willard's own nerve snapped. It seemed as if they had lived years on the sunlit, glamorous sea, drifting toward false visions of land that blended mockingly into the hazy horizon. A peculiar vertigo seized him now when he rose from his seat. He found himself staring out at the gliding waves with a longing to slip over into them and end it all. René watched him with troubled eyes.

"Don't leave me alone, will you?" she said once with a whimsical touch that he loved in her. "I rather dread

night. Don't you?"

"I only dread your suffering." He looked down at her, haggard, unshaven, a world of misery in his eyes. "Do you wish that I had left you on the boat and saved you this?"

She shook her head.

"I'd rather be with you." She reached her hand out to find his clasp. and did not draw back from the shelter of his arm this time. There were no words to speak between them, only a surety of comradeship that brought with it a consolation and peace greater, it seemed, than any earthly love. Hours passed unnoticed while she slept with her head on his shoulder. He had saved the last water to moisten her dry, drawn She opened her eves widely to look up at him once. "I'm sure you did not tell me your name," she said wistfully. He hesitated, and bent his head over her as if he were afraid of being heard.

"Stuart," he told her.

She repeated it after him.

"It's a secret, isn't it? You didn't use it on the boat."

"I tried to leave everything behind that would remind me who I was."

She smiled slightly back at him.

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"You are afraid to stay, and I am afraid I may have to go back. Perhaps this is better, after all, where the choice is taken away from us, and all we can do is drift."

She fell asleep at last with her head on his shoulder. Night seemed a long while coming. After the heavy, golden glare of the long days, he had grown to crave quietude and darkness. He himself slipped into a dreamy state of semi-unconsciousness, his head drooping above her bright, soft waves of loosened hair. It fell about her shoulders in clinging, vital strands. More than ever, he thought, she resembled his Isolde, with her white, beautiful face, wan with hunger and suffering, serene with perfect fearlessness.

The darkness seemed to droop over the ocean from the east with outspread wings like a soothing presence. Hours passed while she slept so, sheltered and supported by his arms. He wakened himself after some time, and stared unbelievingly at the far edge of the horizon to the south east. It was a star, he thought, nothing but a star, until it appeared to approach and grow larger.

Laying her down on his coat for a pillow in the bottom of the boat, he found the flashlight. Standing up with eyes strained toward the moving light, he waited until it was near enough to make certain it was a ship. With the flash light, he waved a circling signal to it, but it traveled steadily on, came to a point opposite the boat, and was passing it, when René stirred uneasily.

"Stuart!" It thrilled and startled him to hear her call him by his own name. "Where are you? What is it?"

"A boat, I think." He set his teeth grimly, and ripped the silk cape off the improvised mast. Winding it about the end of an oar, he set fire to it, waving it back and forth as it flared up into the darkness. She gave a cry at sight of the flame, but Willard was standing now on the thwarts, his lips parted in a

queer, drawn smile. As the fire died out he tossed it overboard.

"They're coming about," he said. "They've seen us, all right." He leaped down beside her, his hands finding hers, holding them fast. "Listen! It's all right. Do you hear me? We're going to be picked up in a few minutes. Good-by, René." His lips found her parched, colorless mouth, and pressed a long, close kiss there without response. As the strange boat approached she lay unconscious in his arms, beyond the significance of his farewell to her.

The Lucy B. Brewster, trading schooner out of Bridgeport, paused on her way to Kingston to pick up the two castaways. After the nightmare of four days at sea, the security of the sturdy three master was paradise to René. She found herself secluded and cared for by Mollie Barlow, the captain's wife, and, strangely enough, she dreaded meeting the man who called himself Jack Willard.

Over and over she demanded of herself, why had she been impelled to yield to the emotional craving for sympathy and impart her father's secret to a stranger. She held his confidence, it was true. He had confessed to the murder of Grant Demarest. woman's name had remained untold. He had told her when they were rescued that he would keep to the trail he had blazed ahead of him in his own mind. At Kingston he would board a steamer bound down the coast from Buenos Aires, and from there anywhere away from New York.

He had seemed to understand her silent reaction toward him, and to respect it. Only the long, close clasp of his hand when he had given her over into the keeping of Mrs. Barlow conveyed to her his wishes for her own happiness, and assurance of all she meant in his life.

She had seen him on deck for a few

minutes when they entered Kingston harbor. She was wearing a dark-blue jersey dress of Mollie Barlow's, and a boy's cap pulled over her bright chestnut curls. She had colored delicately when he crossed the deck to where she was standing, had glanced at his face quickly, as if to challenge his mood. At the completely impersonal look she found there, she held out her hand almost eagerly.

,"I never knew dry land could look like this to me. Did you get my jewels from the bottom of the boat? In that

little velvet hand bag?"

"Captain Barlow has them." His eyes reproached her. She had never mentioned them in the lifeboat. "Dry land does have a certain effect. I have told Barlow all about you—who you are, and so on. He will see that you are treated right here by the consul and sent back to New York safely. You had better take some of this currency to have on hand." He stripped off five one-hundred-dollar bills from the money in his bill fold. "Is that enough?"

"I don't need any, thanks." Unconsciously her tone was formal with him now. "I'll wireless my aunt, or raise money on my diamonds."

He replaced the bills, and smiled down at her.

"You did need me, thank God, once."
She did not answer. The ship was nosing its way up to the long wharf. In the dazzling sunlight the scene ahead of them was like some brilliant mosaic in color, the crowding, gayly clad native figures, the small boats filled with fruit and flowers that edged alongside. René, looking down at it all, closed her eyes, remembering the vast, formless sea and blending sky, the motion of the boat rocking to the long underswell, and his woice soothing her:

"Dawn is dim on the dark, soft water, Soft and passionate, dark and sweet. Love's own self was the deep sea's daughter, Fair and flawless from head to feet—" "Now then, Miss Jordan," Mrs. Barlow's pleasant voice spoke behind her, "we're in at last. You can wear my cape, if you like, but it's pretty warm out yonder in that sun, and we won't be long driving up to the consul's, unless you want to go to the hotel and send for him there, which is what I should do. Always make a man wait on you, if you can."

"Thanks, Mrs. Barlow, you've been ever so kind to me." She took the cape over her arm with a smile. "Luck and happiness to you"—she gave her hand to Willard—"wherever you go."

Before the tragic longing and hopelessness in his dark eyes, her own glance fell. He stood looking after her as she passed down the slanting gangplank between Captain and Mrs. Barlow, hoping that she would turn her head and look back at him leaning over the rail, but she went on into the shadow of the long wharf shed. She was René Jordan now, he thought bitterly, sole heiress to Harley Jordan's fortune, and no one to ask questions.

Before he left Kingston two days later, he satisfied himself by inquiry along the water front that no word had come from other survivors of the San Salvador-at least, to the islands. There was the possibility of the other boats having been sighted, as their own had been, after the days at sea, by northbound ships. In that case, they would be taken to New York. Even so, René's secret lay sunk at the bottom of the sea, Somewhere east of the Windward Passage, the wreck of the South American boat lay on the volcanic reef cast up by the seaquake. It was beyond the range of human possibility that it could ever be salvaged.

He heard through Captain Barlow that Miss Jordan had been placed on board a New York boat at once, and sent home; that she seemed to have suffered no ill effects from her exposure in the open boat, and that every courtesy possible had been extended her as her father's daughter by the consul and steamship officials at that end.

After lingering around Kingston for several days, he finally chose passage on a cattle boat bound for the Argentine. He wanted isolation and hard work to banish her face from his mind, had been different for him, if there had not been a shadow dogging at his heels for the rest of his days, he would never have let her get away from him, he Heading south, he faced the thought. issue squarely. The other woman's face was fading from his memory, her brilliant dark eyes and long, upcurling lashes, her close red lips that rarely smiled, the subtle, indefinable allurement of her, all that had unbalanced his reason and caution. René's image had supplanted it, clear cut, courageous, boyish, with its spiritual quality and mysterious charm.

Love's own self was the deep sea's daughter, Fair and flawless from head to feet.

She had no need of him now, he told himself. Love had been merely a port of call in his life, a vision glimpsed to slip away from his reach. She was returning to the luxury and protected existence she had led before chance or fate had harnessed atidal wave to toss her into his longing arms. And he had entrusted to her the truth about Demarest-had even told her his own first name. would be easy for her to trace the case in the newspaper files, to identify him with it. At least, he had not delivered up to her the name of the woman whose reputation had been the cause of the quarrel at the club that night between Grant and himself. And this had not been to shield Margot herself, he knew, in his heart. It had been because he

dreaded her even suspecting the type of woman who had wrecked his career.

At the same moment René stood at the stern of the Lakota, northbound for New York. Her mind felt numbed by the terrible experience she had under-She dreaded the curiosity of people, the ceaseless questioning concerning her father's fate. The weight of her secret isolated her in her own attitude toward the rest of the world. Because this thing had been done, her own life should, in a way, be an expiation of her father's wrongdoing. The wealth he had succeeded in accumulating repelled her when she thought of its source.

It had been for his sake, too, that she had let Willard go out of her life when she craved his companionship, his protection, perhaps, too, his love. If she had not told him, if he had not, in turn, confided his secret to her, they might have braved their own consciences and found the way together. Even now that she had chosen, she felt a reckless impulse to throw everything into the discard but her longing to find him again.

She stretched out her hands to the blue, tossing sea, almost crying aloud to it to give him back to her. His voice with its peculiar rich cadence came to her out of the starry night:

"But to those who have known and loved her, Men who have heard not her word in vaih, Heaven above and earth below her Seem but shadows that wax and wane."

The Lakota steamed northward toward New York. She laid her head on her crossed arms against the rail, kneeling alone with the widening wake of the boat like a beckoning pathway pointing the way he had gone. Some one passing by turned and went the other way, hearing a woman's low sobbing.

Who Steals My Purse

By Warren E. Schutt

Author of "The Measure of Magnificence,"
"Leveled Purposes," etc.





F it had been any other man in all Paris, the unexampled publicity which Matthias Ballestier drew down upon Mildred Waring's head, by his spectacular greeting of her, would have been embarrassing and even mortifying. To her it was embarrassing enough, to say the least; it might, however, have been far more so, if she had not previously learned so much about the man from Lela Gordon.

It was Lela, wife of Sir Thomas Gordon, one of the British special commissioners in Paris, who had introduced her to John Rhys, of the British embassy; it was Lela who was acting as hostess and sponsor and chaperon to her in Paris, while she waited for her father to come over from America to be present at the wedding; it was Lela, again, who knew everything about every one in Paris who counted. Hence, Mildred was inclined to take at face value what-From her Mildred ever Lela said. learned-and Lela was unusually convincing about it-that Paris excused anything in Matthias Ballestier.

It is true, too, that Mildred had found the man most attractive. She had first met him on the ship coming over. To her-probably, in varying degrees, to every one of the passengers on the vessel-he had stood for something more than a man, something more than a very rich man, something more than a very powerful man. It had, somehow, been bruited about the ship, that it was he who had saved the franc from what lately had bade fair to be a disastrous plunge to mark levels; had saved it by his acumen, by his audacity, by his vast and far-flung connections; by some method the mystery and secrecy of which raised it above the plane of ordinary achievement. To the appreciative, to the imaginative, the feat lent to the imposing Frenchman an aura of romance; lent him an atmosphere of power, inscrutable and therefore unlimited; made him, in some fashion, a Hercules of surpassingly heroic capacities. And, though at that time he gave to her as much attention as, but no more than, he gave to any other woman on the ship, nevertheless she admitted that she knew a sense of flattery that he gave her any, and had been enough interested in the man to ask Lela about him as soon as she arrived in Paris.

Lela had been willing enough, even

glad, to talk about him, in that loquacious, gushing manner she had of talking, that made one pay more attention to what she left unsaid than to what she said. Among other things, Mildred learned that Ballestier, in spite of his being a man of no breeding and of but small acquired taste, had gained entrée to the best Parisian society-in itself no small achievement, True, his vast fortune and power were of much assistance to him; but, more than that, society had found both interesting and engaging his unusualness, his theatricalities, from his fashion in waistcoats to his plunges on the Bourse, and for that very reason, for the fact that he was something of a society buffoon, of, however, an exalted degree, society excused in him those things which no other man could do.

Mildred learned other things as well, but these only by implication: that his name was anathema among married men; that he used women with small reckoning of costs to them; that the very audacity of his conquests seemed to give him the audacity for his unexampled achievements. It was this last bit of gossip about him, coupled with the fact that all the world saw and commented on his public acclaim of her, that made mortifying to Mildred what otherwise would have been amusing, or even a little flattering, even to one of her typically American independence of spirit.

The greeting took place at the Auteuil races. Mildred was in the Gordon box, together with Sir Thomas and Lela, with John Rhys, and with one or two others whose names do not matter. Ballestier's great three-year old, known wherever the sport of kings is known, had just won the Cherentil purse, and Ballestier himself, to the accompaniment of deafening plaudits and vivas from twenty thousand throats, was leading the victorious horse back along the track toward the paddock. Directly in front of the

Gordon box, he came suddenly to a halt, his great, broad figure, looming large in his light gray morning coat, at that very moment the cynosure of twenty thousand pairs of eyes. From the very middle of the track, with a sweeping gesture of his gray hat and a low bow in Mildred's direction, he greeted her. Then he resigned his horse, with a dramatic wave, again to the guidance of the jockey who was still perched in the saddle, and came straight across rail and intervening turf to the Gordon box. His first speech, even before he addressed Lela Gordon, was to Mildred. Certainly, he left no doubt that it was Mildred he had come especially to pay his homage to, and that he wanted the world to know it.

"Not only have I won the Cherentil to-day, Miss Waring," he said in his manner of exaggerated courtliness, "but I have found you again. It has been a surpassingly full day."

It all happened so quickly that none in the box knew quite what had happened until it was over. The unexpectedness of it, her first flush of confusion at the embarrassing publicity thus brought upon her, put Mildred for a moment off her guard. Nevertheless, she found speech before any of the others.

"There must be something of the Roman emperor in you," she said, "since you believe in making your triumphs as public as possible."

Ballestier, unperturbed by her slight sarcasm, went on, still without speaking to the other women in the box:

"I feared I had lost you altogether. This really makes two stupendous gifts from fortune for me to-day."

Mildred realized now that every eye in their immediate vicinity was upon them, every ear trained to the utmost to miss nothing of the conversation. She perceived, also, signs of uneasiness in John Rhys, who, undoubtedly, from his long residence in Paris, knew pretty

well what Ballestier was, and knew what sort of gossip this greeting might make in Paris, coming as it did almost on the morrow of the announcement of their marriage. Before she could make a suitable rejoinder, Rhys made matters worse by speaking in a voice raised high with swift dudgeon. He was excusable for it, of course, for he knew well enough that for the next half hour, or, perhaps, for the next week or month, the tongues of Paris would be rolling delicious morsels at his expense. Nevertheless, Mildred wished that he might have curbed himself.

"I believe, Ballestier," said he, "that you know Lady Gordon and Madame de

Leynes."

Again Ballestier was imperturbable under the censure. He acknowledged the women as urbanely as if he had only at that moment come within speaking distance. And, that slight duty done, he continued his attention to Mildred.

"And now that I have found you again, may I ask you, and beg you, to honor my roof next Thursday night? Surely you can spare an hour in the course of your busy evening. There will be a few friends there—Lady Gordon knows the sort; a little entertainment—the Signorina Cantavoce, Georges Lazieres, a few others."

"I don't know what my engagements

are for Thursday."

Even that did not fluster him. He

spoke now to Lela:

"Lady Gordon, may I charge you, as a special favor to me, to see to it that your charming protegée comes to my entertainment? You, I believe, have something of authority over making her engagements. Now, that I have found her again, I do not want to lose her."

Mildred looked quickly at Lela. She seemed rather tense, a little pale, she thought—perhaps because of his audacity in laying upon her what seemed to amount to a command. Nevertheless, she passed a low-voiced, halting prom-

ise. Ballestier, with another theatric sweep of the hand, left them and followed his horse to the paddock.

After he had gone it was John Rhys

who again spoke first:

"Wherever have you met Ballestier, Mildred?"

"Coming over," Mildred said, still astounded. "Amazing that he should approach me in this way! I scarcely knew him on the ship."

"Beastly cad, the man is. What's he

making a show of you for?"

And in her heart Mildred knew that Rhys could not be blamed for his dislike of the situation.

"I can't think. The man must be crazy. He's never before given me the slightest inkling that he cared to know

me after we left the ship.",

"Not crazy, I think," protested Madame de Leynes, and in her eyes there was something of a new zest. "Is any man crazy who likes pretty and interesting women? You're to be congratulated, ma chère. There are a hundred women—and I am one of the first of them—looking at you now with envy in their eyes."

Mildred shrugged impatiently, at that. "But I simply don't understand it all," she said. Looking back over her shoulder, she saw that what the mundane Frenchwoman had said was literally true. "I scarcely know the man, I tell you."

Sir Thomas Gordon added his comment, and it was, somehow, startling to

her:

"There's no accounting for Ballestier. He usually has some reason—some excellently sound reason—behind his maddest caprices."

Rhys clutched again at that idea:

"You'd better not go to that party of his, Mildred. What d'you think, Lela? You aren't going to take her?"

Mildred looked at Lela, and found her still silent and still a little pale. Madame de Leynes spoke before Lela did, and that fact in itself, considering Lela's usual loquaciousness and ready speech, had some subtle significance.

"Oh, but you can't miss it!" Madame de Leynes said. "His entertainments are too splendid to be missed."

"Am I to go, Lela?" Mildred asked with directness.

"How can I tell what's on?" Lela replied with a curtness strange to her. "We shall see later."

The start of the next race furnished a diversion of attention to other, if less important, affairs, and no more was said of Ballestier by any of them until they went to the car. Then Rhys walked with Mildred, and they, shuffled about by the crowd, fell a little behind the rest.

"I do hope, Mildred," he said, "that you won't go to Ballestier's affair." There was an earnestness in his voice that Mildred could not overlook.

Nevertheless she bantered him:

"Are you so jealous?"

"Anything but, with him," he said, low-voiced. "You understand his sort too well, and I love you enough to be sure of you. No, it isn't that, Mildred."

"Well, what then?"

"It's just that—that Ballestier's reputation is—none too good—and, now everybody knows he's interested in you, everybody'll be watching. And whoever watches will see things sometimes that don't exist. And, though I'd be sure of you, the world might talk. And the wife of a man in my position can't be talked about, or the position goes. Do you understand? I don't mean to dictate—"

A little moved by his apparently real worry, she broke in:

"I understand perfectly, John. I know it would be playing with fire, and I don't intend to go, at all. Does that put you at ease?"

"Thanks, awfully!" he said, almost devout with gratitude.

Mildred was much relieved at her decision, and resolved therewith to put the matter out of her mind. But that was not so easily done. She did not again mention the affair to Lela Gordon. But on Thursday morning Lela announced, rather casually, that she was planning to go to Ballestier's soirée that evening.

"But I don't want at all to go," Mil-

dred protested instantly.

"Nonsense! You'll have no end of a decent time of it. Ballestier will make you envied by——"

"As if that mattered to me, Lela! I'm really not going. I understand too many things about Ballestier; and the publicity he gave me——" She repeated John Rhys' argument to her.

"He's silly. Doesn't he give you credit for any—any prudence or decorum or—or standing of your own?"

With this remonstrance of Lela's, the matter grew at once from a casual conversation to one of deeper significance. Mildred looked sharply at Lela.

Lela was having her morning tea in the small, rather studiously atmospheric sitting room of her suite. Lela was something of a sybarite, in mental pose, at least; and so liked her backgrounds in congruity with what she thought herself to be. And, since Sir Thomas left her pretty much to her own devices so long as she fulfilled his small need of her, she could freely exercise her tastes in this direction. Just now, for example, she was leaning back in cloth-ofgold cushions upon a light-green divan, and the brilliance of the matchless Paris morning was admitted to her only through thin hangings of golden hue. That was all very well so long as she retained her color and the vividness of her personality, as she had it when Mildred first came into the room. But now what a change!

The color seemed suddenly to recede from her, leaving her wan and almost pitiable in that trying light. The sharp contrast, more than anything else about her, awakened Mildred's immediate attention.

"Do you want me to go so much as all that, Lela?" she asked.

Lela was rebellious beneath her outward calm.

"I think you'd do yourself a grave injustice to miss it."

"But I'm very sure that it's not wise for me to go."

"Please go, Mildred! Surely, you can consider yourself above suspicion, can't you?"

"You're so queer about it, Lela. There's something I don't understand."

Lela's reply was that of a woman whose nerves are overtaut.

"Must every one always understand everything?"

"You have a very particular reason for my going?"

"Will you go?" Lela evaded pettishly.
"Must I go?"

Lela thought for a moment.

"He will be very angry if I don't bring you," she said.

"Angry with whom?"

"With me."

"Does that so much matter to you?"
"Don't ask questions."

"But I must know. I think there is something that I should know."

"You are too inquisitive."

"I don't want to go, at all," Mildred said slowly, after a thought. "But if —if what I think——"

"You've no right to think," Lela said with sharp complaint. "I do want you to go. It means much more to me than you can guess. He practically laid a command on me, and, if I don't obey it— Mildred, can't you go, for my sake? He means no harm to you, I am sure, or he wouldn't have asked me to fetch you. And, if I don't, there's no telling what he might do."

Mildred estimated the situation in her own mind, and knew from Lela's air that her estimate was the true one. How far Ballestier had her in his power, it was impossible—and needless—to say. It sufficed to know that she was under his control for one reason or another, and Mildred Waring was not one to betray a friend, however superficially unworthy that friend was.

"Yes, I'll go," she said. "I can look

out for myself."

Lela was almost pathetic in her relief.

"Of course you can look out for yourself. I wouldn't ask any other woman but you. You are so—so—and I am — You can't guess, Mildred."

"I don't try to guess, Lela. I think you are very silly. Not that it matters."

"But I'm not silly. You don't know the—the something—the man has power, fascination——"

"I fancy I shall know it before long. I can, however, take care of myself."

"You are too harsh."

"I don't mean to be. Perhaps not as harsh as I should be." Mildred thought a moment. "Tell me this: have you spoken much about me to him?"

"Of course not. Would any woman not refrain, for her own sake?"

"But he has spoken to you about me?"
"Yes," Lela said hesitantly.

"At other times than in the box at Auteuil?"

"Once, since then," Lela said in a low tone. "It was then he commanded me to fetch you to-night."

"For what purpose? Why does he want me?"

"I don't know. I have, my word of honor, not the faintest notion. But, Mildred, surely, there can be no harm in it for you?" she concluded.

"I think not, Lela. At any rate, we shall see."

And so Mildred Waring went with Sir Thomas and Lela to Ballestier's great house in the Avenue Victor Hugo—went with curiosity, to be sure, but more than that, considering the sharp instinct of apprehension in the back of her mind, with a high, undaunted courage to see it through. Fortunately for him, John Rhys was not there. Although she knew well enough that he could not fail soon to hear all about it, Mildred was glad that he was not at hand, for it was only his absence that averted what surely would have been a crisis.

Ballestier's meeting with her at Auteuil had been spectacular enough, Heaven knew, but it was as nothing compared with the assiduity, with the exaggerated constancy of his attentions to her in his own home. It was almost as if he were claiming her as his own before his entire world, assembled there purposely to see and make talk about his newest inamorata. For she knew that every tongue was wagging, and that Paris would be full of it on the morrow. If she had known that it would be quite as bad as this, she doubted if she would have come at all. As it was, she could do nothing. Her most violent rebuffs failed to stir his equanimity, or to check the steadfastness of his pursuit of her. It was only the sight of Lela Gordon hovering in the background, her eyes pleading pathetically, that forced Mildred to endure it to the end. And she guessed, or hoped confidently, that she could live it down soon enough by her conduct after this day. Surely Lela could not expect too much of her.

Throughout the evening she asked herself what the man's purpose could be. For that he had one, she could no longer doubt.

John Rhys, of course, heard promptly of it, and, as they had tea the next afternoon at Rumpelmayer's, he took her to task for it with a sternness commensurate with its importance to him.

"Please don't think, Mildred, that I mean to dictate who your friends shall be, nor what you shall do. But, if from this there comes any undesirable notoriety for you—well, it means my

career. The government is strict. I must say you have been rather unwise."

"I am sorry," she said without the explanation which she could not give. "I think there will be no notoriety from it."

That assuaged his impatience.
"Of course, if there is any choice necessary, I shall to give up my career.
But——"

"And that I could not endure," she replied with conviction. "I am sure there will be no occasion for any such drastic action."

But she reckoned of too small account the man Ballestier was.

By way of putting her world right about herself, she had dinner that night at Ciro's alone with Rhys, and afterward had a box at the Comédie Française, so that none could abide in the belief that Ballestier had made any real conquest.

Twenty minutes after Rhys had left her at the Gordons', just as she was about to call her maid, a manservant came to her suite and seemed surprised to find her in.

"I wasn't aware that you had returned, mademoiselle," said he. "I have a message for you, which just came." He held to her a memorandum.

"A message? From whom?"

"From Monsieur Rhys. He just telephoned for you. I told him you were not in. I thought you were not. He asked me to give you his message, which is most important."

Mildred read the message, hastily penciled in French:

The worst possible thing has happened. You must come at once to Ballestier's house. I shall meet you there. Have Sir Thomas bring you, to be safe. I am on my way there now.

"Are you sure," Mildred asked the man, "that it was Monsieur Rhys who telephoned you?"

"Absolutely, mademoiselle. I know his voice well enough."

Mildred's mind raced through a multitude of imagined possibilities. One

stood out clearly above all others; she guessed that Rhys, who was strong and fiery and inclined to be jealous because of the very strength of his love for her, had had, after he left her, a disagreeable renconter with Ballestier, by some chance, and had, as a consequence, found himself in serious difficulties. She could think of no other motive that would impel him to telephone her in this fashion. The idea of a trap set by Ballestier did occur to her, but the fact that Rhys had specifically asked her to bring Sir Thomas along seemed to preclude the possibility of ambush at Ballestier's house. Instantly she was on her feet, deeply stirred with the apprehension of what might be happening to Rhys as a result of her indiscretion.

"Is Sir Thomas in?"
"No, mademoiselle."

"Where is he? When is he expected to return?"

"I do not know."

Out of the question now for her to wait for Sir Thomas. The affair with Rhys was pressing, or he would not have telephoned quite as he had done. Surely there could be no physical danger to her at Ballestier's house, well known as it was. As to any other sort of danger, she felt that she could well look out for herself. It was but a short two blocks to the Ballestier palais in the Victor Hugo. She resolved to walk there immediately; and, instead of going up to the Etoile and down the avenue, she took a shorter way through one of the dark cross streets that brought her out almost directly in front of the great, gloomy, hedged-about man-

Now, with some misgiving, she threaded past the tall box shrubs that lined the drive, and almost felt her way up the broad steps, now lighted in but spectral degree from the yellow street lamps. In the dark portico that made the entry, she found a rusty bell pull and tugged at it. She heard the soft clangor

echo within the vestibule; then heard feet approaching, and found herself bathed in a flood of light as the door swung back to disclose a manservant.

"Monsieur Rhys asked me to come here to meet him," she told the servant.

The servant bowed.

"Will you come in, mademoiselle?" he invited, swinging the door back,

"No, certainly not. Tell Monsieur Rhys that I am here, and shall wait here until he comes to me. Of course, I shall not come in." For upon that limit she had decided before ever she set out upon her mission. No more rash act could she commit than to go into Ballestier's house now, unattended, after all the publicity he had made for her. She would wait here until—

But suddenly she was blinded with a great flash of light that seemed to fill the universe for her, accompanied by a faint, rather muffled explosion. A darkness intenser than any she had ever known, cut her off from all the world, and left her numb with wonderment.

Ballestier, who had kept himself informed of John Rhys' movements throughout the evening, accosted him soon after he had left Mildred at the Gordons'. Both men were on foot.

"A most fortunate meeting, Rhys," Ballestier greeted him with urbanity.

Rhys was inclined to be on his guard, "Rather too fortunate to be fortuitous," he said.

"Perhaps! I admit I wanted to see you. I am equally sure that you will want to see me when you know what I have to say."

"I am listening."

"Come to my house for a few minutes. It is only around the corner. I have some brandy, by the way, which was bottled in the year of the States-General. I think you may like it."

Rhys went, not because he wanted to, but because he knew there was no use dodging Ballestier. The business he had, somehow, feared had come to an issue; he might as well know the issue first as last.

In the great house, Ballestier took him to a small study library on the second floor, and to a servant gave crisp commands for evidences of hospitality. Then Ballestier excused himself for a moment, coming back even before the servant had entered with the tray. The servant left at once, and Ballestier played the host in prodigal fashion.

"Let us come quickly to affairs, Ballestier," Rhys said, taking his drink with the air of a man who confers a

favor.

"I am heartily in accord with you. You may, perhaps, have noticed my attentions lately to Miss Waring."

"Yes, I, among others, have noticed them. I find them—a little flattering, perhaps; not unpleasant. Why?"

"You, among others. You among the entire world of Paris. You realize that, of course."

"Yes."

"Then we start in accord and mutual understanding. I have good reason to believe that there has arrived at the embassy advance information concerning your new government's attitude toward Russia, which is not to be given to the public until your government is ready to act, when it will be communicated, as a matter of form, by your ambassador to our government and to the public simultaneously."

"It is of interest to me that you know

it, but not important."

"I know too little about it. I must know more. You can guess how many millions of francs it would be worth to me, if I buy or sell roubles, to know in advance whether Great Britain intends to grant her official recognition to the existing Russian government."

"That, too, has not been of enough importance to actuate me to calculate your gains or losses," Rhys replied.

"It suddenly is of importance to you.

That information in advance is so desirable to me, that I have gone so far as to intrigue Miss Waring into helping me obtain it through you."

"So that was your game." Rhys was still completely undisturbed about it.

"Yes."

"She hasn't yet spoken to me about it," drawled Rhys. "I dare say she will, soon, if it occurs to her."

"You don't take it seriously."

"Is there any reason why I should?"
"You are very sure of her, and of her reputation."

"Of her, yes. I doubt if you can gravely harm her reputation, in spite of

your efforts."

"You know the publicity I have already given her? And how Paris would now seize upon any indication—"

"But there will be no further indica-

tion."

Ballestier looked at his watch.

"There will be one, I think, within a very few minutes." Seeing the quick look of pain that flashed across Rhys' strong face, he knew that he had penetrated the young Englishman's armor. He went on: "I happend to know that you have access to the embassy's dispatch safe, and that, if you do not already know your government's attitude toward Russia, you can obtain it for me within half an hour." Keenly he sought Rhys' unconscious answer to that question, and again he read the answer in his face.

"What do you mean by a further indication?" Rhys had to ask, tormented by apprehension, yet trying to preserve his unruffled demeanor.

"I mean that Miss Waring is coming here; or, perhaps, has already come here. And that——"

"She would never do that."

"I arranged matters with one of her servants, to report a message from you, asking her to meet you here. She has started. Perhaps she has been here and gone." "Been here, and gone? Then what ____" Rhys was puzzled beyond expression.

"When she comes to my door, and stands against the tiled background of my portico—in her evening gown, as she left you, and cloak—when she comes and seeks admission, a flash-light photograph will be taken of her. Need I say anything more?"

"Yes! And then what?"

"Well, the public expect it by this time. Can there be any further proof of her—indiscretion?"

"You'd never dare give it out, even if you had the photograph. You would

ruin yourself forever."

"I know that. I would not give it out. But I have a friend—a woman, rather more than a friend, let us say—pretty well racked with jealousy of Miss Waring; a woman of no standing, so that it could not hurt her to do what I ask her to. She could with impunity take the photograph, and dispose of it at a good price to Le Miroir Mondain. The article, and the photo, would be zestfully scanned by Paris."

"That rotten rag!" Rhys cried in real alarm, for now he knew that Ballestier's plan of blackmail was error proof. The jealous woman, who spied, who took the flash light of Ballestier's early-morning caller, who sold it for money to that fashionable if scurrilous magazine which had its chief circulation among the perverted minds of the social world of Paris—a perfect plan, hole proof, one in which Ballestier could never be caught.

"You have an offer to make, I suppose," Rhys said after a time.

"Yes! Fetch me your government's dispatch regarding the Russian situation some time before nine o'clock to-morrow morning, and, in return for five minutes' glance at it, you shall have the photographic plates."

"And it is all for this that you—
Still, I have no time to waste in fur-

ther discussion. You shall have my answer soon." Rhys was on his feet to leave. There was still a bare chance that Mildred had not fallen into the trap, or that she had not yet come to the house. There might yet be time to frustrate Ballestier's plans, for had he not said that he was not sure whether Mildred had yet been there?

His rushing exit was halted by the entrance of a servant, who spoke in an undertone to Ballestier. The smile on Ballestier's face told Rhys plainly enough that the trap was sprung.

"Before nine to-morrow morning," Ballestier reminded Rhys with that tantalizing urbanity of his.

Mildred's unannounced entrance diverted to her the astonished attention of both of them. The servant backed away from her, awe-stricken, it seemed, leaving her alone in the doorway.

"What is it the man wants of you?" she asked Rhys without further introduction.

Rhys seemed for a moment spellbound by the sight of her, standing there in the evening gown and opera cloak exactly as he had left her at her own door scarcely half an hour before, yet now so indescribably changed. She was now a different woman, as if she were looking down in scorn upon the world, instead of being a part of it.

"What is it you want of him?" she demanded of Ballestier this time.

"Mildred, you shouldn't have come here," Rhys gasped.

"I realize that, but it does not matter now. Tell me what he wants of you."

Rhys told her, in the simplest possible words.

"And you—what are you going to do about it?" she asked Rhys.

"Do as he says! Can I do anything else? It is my only way out now. It won't cost me so much to do that, as to—"

"Is it an affair of relative costs? Still

it will cost you nothing, will it? Not seriously, I mean. Would any one know?"

Ballestier beamed on her.

"You have my profound respect for your common sense," he smiled.

"Thanks!" she said dryly. "In my own interests, at any rate. I must, of course, have some warrant that no additional prints are made from the photographic plate."

"I can give you my word of honor

that---"

"Which is of no value to me. The man who took the photograph—where is he? He came into the house."

"Do you want to speak with him?"
"I want to make sure that he has no opportunity to make these prints."

"I shall have him called." Ballestier gave the necessary orders.

Mildred turned then to Rhys.

"John, can you enter the embassy offices to-night?"

Rhys replied with lips suddenly parched.

"The porter will let me in—and undoubtedly inform the ambassador."

"Too bad!" Mildred said in a light tone. "That cannot be helped, under the circumstances. Monsieur Ballestier, what I propose is this: Let your photographer, and you, and Monsieur Rhys, and I—all of us, go at once to the British embassy. Monsieur Rhys will then——"

"No," put in Ballestier, instantly on his guard. "Let him bring the dispatch here to me. You may stay here and watch your photographer, if you like."

"I—stay here with you? Scarcely! You could not expect it. If my reputation is ruined, let it be ruined, then."

Ballestier recognized the impasse and shrugged his great shoulders.

"After all, it is not an important point. I can look out for myself. Let it be as you say."

The photographer came in, carrying such a camera as newspaper men use,

and declared that he had not yet removed the plate. Indeed, considering the shortness of time that had elapsed, it was scarcely thinkable that he could have done so. Mildred confessed herself satisfied on that point.

Ballestier called his car, and the four of them set out together in the direction of the Arc de Triomphe. At that point, in the full light of that blazing center, in the midst of scurrying automobiles and pedestrians bent on midnight frolics, Mildred suddenly caught the speaking tube and commanded the chauffeur to stop. Ballestier, taken off his guard in spite of his prudent watchfulness, caught the tube abruptly away from her.

"Don't countermand the order," Mildred said, "or I shall cry out for help. How far would you get with the police when they hear a woman crying out for help?"

"You can't bluff me. You wouldn't dare so much endanger your reputation—you up in the police court! And remember, I am Ballestier."

"Yes, you are Ballestier. And it is on precisely that fact that I am counting. And, since you are Ballestier, you will not endure a charge of blackmail, especially when I shall turn the evidence of it over to the police when they come. Can you escape it? Ask yourself. Will being Ballestier help you in the French criminal courts?"

Ballestier stared at her, in incredulity. Never had he, in all his experience, come across a woman who dared defy him with such audacity. A simple enough affair to ward off the police, if she raised a cry, provided he had no intention of criminal guilt; but a far different matter when, in the car, he had proof against himself of attempted blackmail against a woman of her standing. That not even Ballestier could get away with, and none knew it better than Mildred. Nevertheless, he continued his bullying tactics.

"You wouldn't dare call the police."

"Don't forget what it means, Monsieur Ballestier, if I cry out for the police. I shall ask them, when they come, to take charge of the camera—intact. And I shall cry out—now—unless you give me the camera, and let the two of us go."

"Wait--"

"Not a second. It is now, or——"
She stretched out her hand toward the camera.

For a moment there was tense silence, broken only by the sound of John Rhys' labored breathing, as there came to him the full significance of the dilemma in which Mildred's quick thinking had placed Ballestier. Then an unconscious exclamation of delight burst from his lips, and this seemed to loosen Ballestier's tongue.

"Wait-" Ballestier began.

"Wait for what? Not a second, Monsieur Ballestier. We are in the public street now, away from the shelter of your house. Think well, and think quickly. It is no longer my reputation against your purse, but your reputation against mine. Do I have the camera, or shall I call the police?"

Ballestier, watching her in amazed indecision, saw her lips open to cry

out.

"Let her have the camera and begone," he cried, passing his hand over his perspiring face.

Then, as Mildred recovered the camera and gave it to Rhys, he added, with

all his old urbanity:

"My congratulations, mademoiselle. What is it your Shakespeare says? "Who steals my purse——' Au revoir, mademoiselle, under conditions more amiable."



THE LITTLE RED GHOSTS

THE little red ghosts of the kisses you never quite gave me Will linger behind you, enslave me

After you've gone.

They will play on my lips, make them quiver like leaves to the whisper Of kisses less rosy but crisper—
The breezes of dawn.

They will plague me at night, oh! tease me and taunt me and jeer me Because of the sweets that were near me

And never were tasted.

More bitter than coldness, rebuffs, or the harshest of scornings, To remember the sweetest of mornings

By moments one wasted.

They will taunt me the more for my daring to mock at all tempting, Jeer me beyond all exempting

Because of my boasts. So long as I live with russet-tipped cedars about me

And the quiver of leaves, they will flout me—

The little red ghosts.

RICHARD BUTLER GLAENZER.

Gifts of the Greeks

By Beatrix Demarest Lloyd

Author of "The Hostess Woman,"
"Cock Robin," etc.





R. WILLIAM COURTENAY BETHUNE had had his usual turbulent day in the city. There were the clients who, having this moment ordered their advertising, could not be brought to understand why it could not be delivered day before yesterday; there were his copy writers and a peculiarly massive art director who could not hold out any hope before day after to-morrow; there were the printers so dubious about the future that they held out no hopes at all. The Bethune offices were very elegant and pleasant and sunny, and so through all vexation was Mr. Bethune himself.

He was a tall, very personable fellow, with rather extraordinary darkred hair, which was as valuable to him as an inspired slogan, for it made him unforgetable. When a man wanted an advertising job done he thought of Bethune-that red-haired chap-and told his secretary to get his office on the phone. Billy Bethune in college had rowed three on the varsity, and had the shoulders to prove it. thirty-two now, and had never gained a pound, as, indeed, he would have been hard put to it to have done, what with these driving activities in the city and golf and tennis over the week-end at Rosmere. There was something still bovish about his eyes-very level gray eyes with a sort of heartiness in them. To his office force he was the eighth wonder of the world, for he never lost his temper. He was always as level in tone as he was in look. It was quite uncanny.

But the day had been wearing, and it was good to get off the train at Rosmere and know that it was over. His fellow passengers sorted themselves out among the many waiting motors, and he saluted, as he made his way across the station plaza, many of their devoted feminine chauffeurs. His wife did not drive a car, and never thought of being driven down to meet him. It was natural enough, for he had always used the roadster, leaving it at the garage during the day. Still, he confessed to a pang of envy as he saw the others going off in cheerful company. Tom's grin as he entered the garage was quite as cheerful, to be sure, but it was not a mere grin at the start that would enliven his lonely drive home. He took the big roadster out smoothly, and when he had passed the busy corner let it out to a silent speed.

It was very beautiful in the country—early May—with the green hanging through the trees like an emerald smoke. He would get Peggy to come for a spin through the afternoon sunshine, down along the Shore Road and round by L'Hommedieu's Point. Unless, of course, she was playing bridge. Or unless—

With a twist of the mouth, he left the thought unfinished.

The road lay winding through the prettiest part of Rosmere, where each house must by restriction undertake to

dominate at least five acres. On every place as he passed he saw hedges being trimmed, gardens cultivated, and there were patient optimists uprooting dandelions from green lawns. Three men with garden brooms were sweeping the grass under the trees in Callender's orchard. It had always seemed to him the last word in husbandry. Landscape gardening in Rosmere partook of the meticulous attention to details that one might expect in a lady's boudoir.

His own house, just beyond the next bend in the road, was one of the most charming in that discriminating collection of homes. Bethune, Sr., had designed and built it as a wedding gift to Peggy. It was like an English cottage that had gone on growing new rooms, a low-lying, widespread structure with the flat surfaces of great irregular stones showing through the cement of the walls. The thatchedshingled roof had an artful sag between the chimneys. Here and there in corners varied evergreens hugged the building, but kept carefully away from the lattice windows, for Bethune wanted plenty of sunshine in a house. grounds were thickly planted with flowering shrubs among the goodly trees, except where Peggy's flower garden filled a generous expanse back of the house, and where his tennis court lay at the side. It was a place both to love and to be proud of, and William Courtenay Bethune always blessed his father when it came into sight at the bend of the road.

To-day, however, he omitted this pious gratitude. As he passed the corner of the hedge, he saw standing before his door a long, biscuit-colored car smartly lined with red leather. His expressive mouth gave itself another twist, and his eyes narrowed. With an impatient mutter, he almost unconsciously turned his steering wheel back to the left, and, putting up the speed, went straight on past his home. Brows

drawn down, mouth set, and a complete lack of heartiness or boyishness in his eyes, his face would scarcely have been recognized in his own office. William Courtenay Bethune had lost his temper. Or not so much had he lost something, as had he become on the instant a full-filled vessel of wrath.

"This," said Mr. Bethune between his teeth, "is getting to be monotonous."

Just why he had driven by, he hardly knew, nor why he was making for the Shore Road and L'Hommedieu's Point. It was one thing to take Peggy there and another to go there without her. But his subconscious self knew all about it. "Bill," it was saying to him, "you want to go where you can be alone for a bit. You're mad clear through, and in no condition to mix this thing. Just you come on off here, where the chances are you will not see a soul, park the car, and sit out on the end of the point, and look at Connecticut for a while. And let's think this thing out."

So Bethune drove on under this tutelary ægis, past the links and the country club, through the old town which had grown up in the days when transportation to this part of the world was exclusively by water, past the abandoned steamboat dock and the yacht club, and then bumped off over the rougher road that skirted L'Hommedieu's Cove. Obedient to his orders, he left the car at the roadside, and hands thrust into pockets, head bent, walked stolidly forward to a conference with his better judgment. The trees were a ragged lot here, with many branches starkly naked among their better-dressed relatives; the ground was rough and hillocky; the grass coarse and full of bald patches. No beautyparlor attentions were here given to the face of nature. He went on to the edge of the vegetation, and down the shelving bank onto the beach. The point ran out into the Sound, an isolated peninsular leaving the shore behind it on both sides. It was not a lively spot, but it had the merit of unpopularity. If one wanted to be alone, one could hit upon no more likely place. He stood a moment staring out over the water, and then, in obedience to a nudge from his alter ego, took out a cigarette, lighted it, and sat down to be admonished. However, having attended to all these details, his subconscious self returned to its depths, and let him do his own thinking.

If there was one thing in the world he was sure of, it was Peggy. That side of the question, thank God, he did not need to consider. Peggy was all that was fine and stanch and straightforward, but it was possible to be all these things and still make mistaker.

There was no doubt in the mind of William Courtenay Bethune that Felix Mallory was a mistake.

He would not need to be told more about any man than that he went every day to pay his court to a young married woman, with the utmost disregard of what sort of gossip it might inspire against her. That luxurious, biscuitcolored car with its red-leather interior was an object to arrest the eye, and Bethune objected to its daily arresting the eye at his front door. But more than that did he object to the man within the house. It was quite true that he did not want the tarnish of gossip to touch Peggy, but that was only the exterior aspect of the case. He didn't want Peggy to have any place in her life for the Felix Mallorys. He wanted to fill that life himself. Yes, and he would, too! He threw his cigarette into the water to emphasize that point.

Mallory was a wonderful chap—with women. There was nothing like boyishness in his eyes! His eyes were dark and rather sad, and one of his effective accomplishments was an undisputed mastery of the piano. The connection between the two was this: that, used

according to formula, in conjunction, he could say many things to a woman without even opening his lips. If after a long silence, a woman should find his eyes fixed upon her with a general suggestion of Poe's raven in their melancholy depths, and should a moment or so later be listening to his exquisite rendition of the "Liebestraum," it is quite likely that she would understand him as well as if he had gone into the matter exhaustively in English.

As a method of love-making, it had other points besides its explicitness to recommend it. Things one has never said, one has never to unsay. When the time came that the current philander began to bore him, the woman received the long, silent look, and a moment or so later was listening to Felix Mallory leaving the house. He never broke any bones, did Mallory, though once and again the wonder had been expressed that his own osseous articulation remained intact. As it was, he not only had an unfractured but an exceedingly graceful skeleton. This was the man on the thought of whom Bethune now bent his brows.

If there was any gossip on in this naturally talkative community, he, William Courtenay Bethune, must guard himself against adding spice thereto. Well, he had passed his apprenticeship at self-control. He had tamed a naturally quick temper and broken it to harness. All the energy and rapid thinking that went to a moment of anger, he could deflect into more creative channels. He knew he was frowning now, he knew that his hand would now and again knot itself up into a fist, but this was a solitary orgy. After this moment, and when he had planned his course, he would indulge himself no more.

What he set himself to do was to take Peggy apart, just as he was accustomed to do his clients, and see in just what way he could influence these

materials to his own ends. It was unnecessary that he should concern himself more directly with Mallory. He had a very vehement longing to concern himself so, emphatically, for the space of a quarter of an hour, but Mallory, with a new blackness to his black eyes, would be on the wrong side of the ledger. He lighted another cigarette, and set himself to consider Peggy.

His return trip was marked by a notable absence of speed. He loafed along in the roadster, hatless, smoking, relaxed behind the wheel on which his hand lay very lightly. As he came to the club, he turned in and ran the car around to the glassed-in veranda at the back. Leisurely he got out of the car, with a series of long-legged evolutions. stepping over the closed door, and, full of an amiable interest in his fellowmen, went up into the gallery. Voices greeted him. In one corner at a table sat some of his particular cronies-Sam Hatch, old Callender, George Oliver, and Perry Cadwallader. In groups about the wicker-furnished space were other men he knew, and beyond in the lounge, so open as to be like a part of the veranda, were many others. This was as he wished it. There were a few women, but most of the feminine members of the club had already gone home to superintend the end of the day for the very junior members, and to dress for dinner. Not a care in the world drew the tiniest of lines on the open brow of William Courtenay Bethune as he lounged over to his friends. They were breaking the Mohammedan law against drink so lately superimposed upon a Christian constitution.

"It grieves me to see this," said Be-

thune cheefully.

"Cry all you like," grunted old Sebastien Callender. "It's a sad occasion. I have this day opened my last case of prewar." He set the bottle nearer to Bethune, and rang for another glass. "Don't expect any sympathy," said his latest guest. "You are the only man in town who has any of that vinttage. Hence, as you say, your large circle of friends." Callender grinned at him and put his cigar back into the grin. "What's new? Who is still out of jail?"

The talk veered to politics, and from that to a severe arraignment of the greens committee. The fact that this committee was practically Sam Hatch made this more poignant. Bethune finally glanced at his watch, and gave a soft whistle.

"Must be on my way," he said, and the more regretfully as that which he had hoped for had not come to pass. But it was to be. As he rose from his chair, and stood a moment saying a few last airy nothings, Felix Mallory came through the glass doors from the steps.

"Hello!" said Mr. Bethune.
"Greetings!" said Mallory, smiling.
"You're just the man I want to see

"You're just the man I want to see," said William Courtenay Bethune.

There was a slight stir among the men near him. It was only momentary because—of course, it was absurd. Bethune would never do a thing like that. Mallory, without a flicker in his dark eyes of anything but agreeable interest, came on toward him.

"At your service!" he said.

"Good night, Cally. Thanks for the potion. 'Night." He turned away with Mallory, but only a step or two. "Got anything on for Friday evening?"

"Friday?" mused Mallory. "No, I

think not."

"Well, I tell you," said Mr. Bethune,
"I got seats for that opening of 'The
Girl with the Grouch,' and I can't make
it. My big fish is coming over from
Philadelphia and wants me to sit up
with his sick business. I may be able
to dine, but no theater. What I wanted
to ask you was, could you go with
Peggy? I suppose musical-comedy stuff
is not just your line."

"I should be delighted," said Felix Mallory with an utterly correct intonation. "Suppose you both dine with me

at the Metropolitan?"

"Thanks. Now, wait a sec. I'd better give you the seats now. I've got them here somewhere." They were beyond earshot of most of the men in the place but the amicable quality of the conversation was evident, and when Bethune began searching through his pockets all eyes dwelt curiously upon him. It was that not one eye should miss it that William Courtenay Bethune was going through these motions. He had pulled off many a telling effect, this chap with the guileless eyes.

"Right! Here you are. I might forget them." He slipped his finger into the envelope, and slid out the unmisbright-colored pasteboard "No mistakes rectified after tickets. leaving the window," he murmured with a laugh, glanced at them, put them back, and handed the envelope to Mallory. As he stepped nearer the door he raised his voice a trifle, "Better make it seven? Peggy hates to miss the first act." Every one in the place heard that remark. In fact, the whole roomful had gradually given up pretending not to stop, look, and listen. Bethune was satisfied with the scene. It had not been offhand, nor forced, just perfectly natural. He nodded and went out.

He reached home much later than usual. Peggy was already dressed for tinner, and in the drawing-room. She was very pretty!

"Sorry I'm late," he said, going in for a moment on his way upstairs. "I say, what a fetching rig."

"This?" laughed Peggy as she kissed

him. "You've seen it before."
"Have I? Lord, you confidir

"Have I? Lord, you confiding women—one shoulder brace!"

"What made you so late?"

"I wasn't late to start with, if you know what I mean. I came out early,

and have been yarning away at the

"Oh!" It was an odd little sound, which, being interpreted, meant something like: So he's begun to go to the club without even coming in to say hello! She turned away, and Mr. Bethune permitted himself one momentary smile.

"How much time have I? Never mind. I'll be down in my usual twelve minutes." He went leaping up the stairs. In his bath, he shook his head. "It's old stuff, Bill, but she is so young and you are so beautiful that you have no need to be original." He came downstairs prompt to his allotted time, and found Peggy in her chaise longue, with her knees up, looking at something lying against their uplifted angle.

"Where's dinner?"

Peggy lifted her eyes rather coldly. "I told them to set dinner back twenty minutes. Anna will tell us."

"You look like Trilby with the portrait of Svengali." He came on, around the back of her chair. "What is it?"

For answer, she handed it up to him past the back of her head, and without speaking lighted a cigarette. Bethune's mouth gave its fortieth twist behind her. It was a very large and expensive photograph of Felix Mallory. With all the heartiness in life he could have torn it across and across and tossed the bits into the waste basket, but instead he moved around with it to the standing lamp as if to get a better_light on it.

"Corking good," he said warmly. "I say, Peggy, that's a wonderful photograph!"

"Isn't it?"

"Must have cost like the deuce——"
"He gave it to me for my birthday,"
she said.

Bethune jerked up his head.

"Your birthday!"

"Well, of course, it's a week early, but what does that matter?"

"Lord, that doesn't matter," said

Bethune going back to the portrait. "For a minute I thought I must be a week late, that's all. I was afraid I might have done something stupid." As the maid came to announce dinner, he took a last, lingering look at the picture, and then stood it up in a conspicious position on the mantel. "I saw Mallory at the club," he said, "and we made a date. I hope you don't mind."

She moved rather aloofly to her place at table.

"Felix was here this afternoon," she

"Sometimes I envy men who don't have to work, and that would be one of the times," said Bethune pleasantly. "Well, you see, I got those seats for 'The Girl with the Grouch,' and then old Allenby phones me from Philadelphia that he's coming over Friday, and wants me afternoon and evening. I may be able to get away for dinner. But Mallory says he'll take you like a shot, and we're to dine with him at his club."

"But suppose you can't come?"

"You needn't wait for me. You can just begin at seven, and I will come if I can."

She regarded him rather curiously. "Don't you think it might look a little odd, my dining alone with him there?"

"My dear Peggy, you know what a morgue that place is! You'll see maybe a dozen people, and not one of them will know you, probably." He began to eat his grapefruit and did not look at her. But he saw her spoon poised motionless in her pretty hand-he did not have to lift his eyes to do thatand its arrested attitude was very eloquent. "Now that," said he to himself, "is enough for one day. We mustn't overdo this." Had Peggy been less clever, he would have talked on about Mallory, but, as it was, he dropped him from the conversation altogether.

The great rectangle of Mallory's

counterfeit presentment remained in its marked position all evening. He noticed in the morning that it had been moved to a less obvious place at one side of the room, to a small console table. He paused to look at it on his way in to breakfast.

"You beauty!" he said softly.

Peggy never came down for breakfast. Indeed, early rising was too much to expect of any woman who looked so distractingly lovely in bed, and who had such luxurious paraphernalia for making herself both beautiful and comfortable there. He always went up after he had finished to smoke his cigarette with her, and to look at her. He had a little trick of kissing the palm of her hand when he left, and closing her fingers over it, as if he left her for the day with a kiss to hold. This morning he sat on over his coffee, and smoked alone. It was one of the hardest things he had ever tried to do. His watch he consulted every thirty seconds, but the time crawled along. Twice he tossed down his napkin and rose, and twice he said to himself inexorably, "Bill, sit down." He smashed the fire from the cigarette in which he took no pleasure, and drank a whole glass of iced water. When, at last, his durance was at an end, he jumped up and hurried out into the hall.

"Oh, Peggy!" he called as he caught up his hat and gloves. "I'm late. Sorry! Take care of yourself and have a good day."

"Au 'voir!" came Peggy's coolest voice.

He ran down the steps, got into his waiting roadster, and whirled away.

When he returned that evening, Felix Mallory's portrait was once more on the mantel.

Anna, who had heard him come in, came to the door with a message.

"Mrs. Bethune, sir, said to tell you she had gone motoring, and you were not to wait for her." At this moment the telephone in the hall gave a rilling shriek, and Anna vanished to attend on the summons. Bethune waited, hands deep in his pockets, drawn to his full height. Warfare with Peggy! It gave him a curious, tingling sensation at the nape of the neck, which he recognized with a grin. Cave-man stuff! Anna's voice could be heard no-ma'aming and yes-ma'aming in the hall, until at last the receiver clacked back into place and she reappeared.

"That was Mrs. Bethune, sir. She said she would be here in an hour and a half, and was bringing some people. We're to set out a buffet supper for about ten people, and they will wait on themselves. Mrs. Bethune said to ask you, sir, if you would have your dinner as usual, or if you would wait

for them."

"I'll wait, of course."

Anna lost no time in getting back to the kitchen for, with only an hour and a half to get up a buffet supper for ten, she had not a moment to lose. The cook would be furious!

William Courtenay Bethune walked over to the mantel and looked at Felix.

"Very pretty," he said quietly. "Oh, very pretty!" He put one finger on the point of Felix's chin, very slightly to one side. "Spot marked X shows where the lullaby should be delivered." He took the picture down and looked at it. "You've got to hate this face, Peggy," he whispered, "before I am done with you." It would not do to leave it there, dominating his home, when all those silly people came. He'd put it back on the console. When he set it there, against the wall, it somehow slipped on the smooth surface of the table and fell to the floor. leaned to pick it up, and with it in his hand stood suddenly, unaccountably motionless, staring away in front of him. A moment later the maids were startled in their distant kitchen by hearing Mr. Bethune's sudden peal of gargantuan laughter. It rolled about the rooms like the sound of drums, beating out a rhythmic "Ha-ha-ha!" as if the whole cosmos had become a joke.

"God bless me!" said Anna. "He's thought of something funny, surely!"

And so he had. He went laughing up to dress, and achieved a satisfactory transformation in the intervals of appreciative chuckling. When the motoring party arrived, he called out from the dining room and violently agitated the cocktail shaker. They saw him standing between the bountifully spread supper table and the sideboard, rattling the great silver capsule, smiling, hospitable, in the jolliest mood imaginable.

The party began with a notable lift in spirits. Irene Hatch fairly threw her motor coat and hat at her husband in her eagerness to eat, drink, and be merry. She went dancing across the room to her host, her straight, black, bobbed hair slapping at her childish cheeks. Sam, with her outer garments as a nucleus, went nimbly about gathering up all the women's things, with a resonant cry of: "Ol' clo'!" The Olivers had already started a fox trot on the phonograph in the music room, and were taking a few eccentric steps, none of which moved them far from the tray of glasses where Bethune was pouring cocktails from his shaker. Perry Cadwallader and Dorrie Brown had attacked the sandwiches, and Pussy Buell was picking walnuts off the cake icing. Among all these rather noisy undignified folk, Felix Mallory and Peggy moved with graceful dignity, the notable likeness in their manner setting them, somehow, apart. Bethune's hands shook once as he filled the glasses, but his face never lost its look of simple amusement. Mallory was helping Peggy to serve the salads, waiting upon her every movement with his confounded deftness.

"Give us a toast!" cried Dorrie Brown, glass in hand. "Our hostess!" said Mallory, half

turning from his labors.

"How do you think of these things!" jeered Perry. "Don't know when I've heard anything so——"

"I'll give you a toast," said Sam Hatch. "To our bootleggers!"

Bethune turned Irene about, and, with their backs to the party, put his elbows confidentially on the dresser.

"Let's have a little toast all to ourselves," he said. "Bill," he was saying inwardly, "it's old stuff." He had not the slightest desire to look into Mrs. Hatch's black eyes, but he did it very well. And then suddenly he began to laugh again.

"Hey, wot's the joke?" called Oliver.
"He looked at me and laughed!"

shrilled Irene.

"You shouldn't say such funny things," said Bethune, and stopped her

mouth with an olive.

Thoroughly well did he understand that Peggy had brought this crowd home to interpose it between themselves. And, consequently, when the last loud good nights had been called from the departing motors, he turned to her a smiling and contented face.

"That's a handful!" said he. "Had

a good time?"

"I'm rather bired," said Peggy

casually.

"Well, off to bed with you!" He kissed her. "Sleep late, if you can. I won't disturb you in the morning." He watched her move toward the stairs and held himself back. He wanted to follow her. He suddenly wanted to take her in his arms and call a truce. She faltered at the front of the steps.

"You don't disturb me," she said

gently.

"I'll peek in and see if you are awake," he answered cheerfully. "Good night." She saw him from the tail of her eye cross the room to his favorite chair.

"You're staying up?"

"I'm not sleepy," said William Courtenay Bethune. "That crowd is not sedative! Great little bunch! I'm glad you brought them in." He picked up the evening paper and sat down. Quite silently Peggy went on her way with her nose in the air. He was conscious of her every step.

The Friday evening entertainment distinctly lacked flavor. Even Felix Mallory found there was something a bit flat about taking a lovely lady to the theater at her husband's request. Dinner at the club was, of course, epicurean, but there was only one other party in the ladies' dining room, and the place was depressing. Bethune came in half an hour late, and stayed only long enough to let himself be seen by any possible tattler. When he joined them at the theater after the show to motor home to Rosmere, he thought he had never seen Peggy so spiritless. Felix Mallory had had his unfailing interest in his own love-making to feed his soul upon, but even he had found the whole thing a bit long. It would be better when he could see her again alone-really alone. But that could not be until Monday! A long time to wait to recapture the thrill of his pursuit of her. Bethune did most of the talking on the way home.

But Saturday he found a completely restored Peggy breakfasting in bed. She had a wide pink ribbon around her curly brown head with a roselike bow at one side; her bed was covered in Flemish lace over rose chiffon to match her jacket, and she. herself like a rose, was, to judge by her appetite, in the

best of health.

"Well, what's on?" he asked according to Saturday's habit.

"What are you dressed like that for?" said she, giving him her cheek to kiss.

"I've got to go to town, but I'll be home for luncheon. Let's lunch at the club and ask the Hatches." Peggy took a slightly savage bite out of her toast.

"I'm tired of the club. And the Hatches," she said. "What is taking you to town?"

William Courtenay Bethune rolled a chintz armchair to the side of her bed and sat down.

"Well, you see, I have an important matter to take up to-day with Mr. Tiffany," he said. He was looking at her with the indulgence of a happy lover. Her blue eyes came around to his, and a dimple appeared in her cheek. "If girls in pink ribbons will have birthdays!"

"Well?"

"Well, then, it behooves a boy to save up his pennies for the day. I've been saving up."

"Thrifty boy!" There was another dimple. "In a china pig?"

"Prize big pig," he qualified it.
"Took me a long time to count the pennies—there are just two hundred thousand of them!"

The dimples deepened. An effort in calculation told her that this was two thousand dollars, and for that, even at Mr. Tiffany's—— She lay back on her pillows, blushing with pleasure.

"I took a sort of look around yesterday, but I hadn't much time. So I thought I'd just trundle in to-day."

"Let me go with you!" begged Peggy.

He shook his head decisively.

"You're not to see what it is until to-morrow," said he. He finished his cigarette, kissed her blithely, and went his guileless way.

Blissful anticipation was Peggy's order of the day. Visions of rings and wrist watches danced before her eyes. Diamonds she had, but she could never have enough, and a new ring could have kept her happy on her deathbed. Mallory and his Chopin could find no place in her thoughts. It always made her uncomfortable to have to admit to her-

self that he would not come on Saturdays, and that she knew why, but today nothing could give her a twinge of discomfort.

She sat at the piano herself, and played the ragging music for which she was famous among her friends. The house resounded to jubilant syncopation. She ordered a strawberry shortcake for dinner.

She later drove over to a great nursery and bought the carful of flowers. Only one other thing besides her birthday gift occupied her mind, and that was, should she give a big dinner party Sunday night? Everybody would come on short notice. But she decided against it. As a matter of fact, she could have a happier time by herself, just playing with her new toy and adoring it. She felt the day to be interminable, and when that was gone the evening began to stretch like elastic. Bethune was smiling and silent. He would answer no questions. When she got into bed she could not sleep, like a child on Christmas Eve.

Mornings of one sort and another can be depended upon to show up sooner or later, and her birthday came at last. She and Anna took special pains to make her matutinal toilet notable, and were thoroughly successful. Her breakfast tray came up with a rose on her plate. The telephone at her bedside began an early busy day and continued to ring at flatteringly short intervals. All the packages that Anna had received and secreted were brought forth.

But it was for William Courtenay Bethune, Esquire, that she waited, and when he came in with one hand behind him she sat up with a little bounce in the bed.

"Many happy returns," said Bethune with marked originality. He came to a stand at the foot of her bed.

"Thank you, Billy, dear," said Peggy breathlessly.

"And here's your present," said he. He held out to her a large, flat box. A chill of misgiving touched her. But her hands went out to it. As she brought it to rest in her lap, it seemed extraordinarily heavy. She gave his bland face one fleeting glance of perturbation, and lifted off the cover." She sat staring at what she saw.

There lay, indeed, a beautiful thing and one well worth the contents of a China pig, but her heart turned to stone within her.

It was a wide frame of solid dull gold, deeply incised with a broad band in the Greek-key pattern, and this band was paved with row upon row of small jewels in every color that jewels may have. It might have been worthy to enshrine the portrait of Helen of Troy, but what it did frame was the large and expensive photograph of Felix Mallory.

Peggy turned white. But Bethune was busy lighting his cigarette and did not look at her.

"Isn't that a whacker?" he asked, puffing out the match. "I just happened to find it, up in their blue room where they show that yellow-diamond girdle, and things like that. And I knew right away you'd like to have it for Mallory's picture."

Peggy could not speak. Bethune was rolling up the easy chair and went right on talking.

"It's some picture, but I'll say it's some frame, what? The Prince of India might feel honored to be looking out of it. It hit me as the most corking thing I'd ever seen."

"It's—it's very beautiful," said Peggy in a very small voice.

He started to sit down but checked himself.

"Oh, and I got you some of those marrons you like so much," said he. "I'll fetch them." He went out, leaving the door open, and she could hear him running down the stairs. He took a box from the drawer of the hall table, and went in search of Anna. "Take this up to Mrs. Bethune and say I'll be back directly. Charley wants me to come out to the garage a moment." He went out the back door, sheltered from her sight, and sat down on the steps. "Now, Bill," he said grimly, "give her a chance to take it in."

By the time Peggy Bethune was ready to come downstairs, she was wellnigh exhausted with her emotions. The crushing feeling of disappointment oppressed her, the wild rage over this fatuous waste of money shook her to her bones, and, hardest of all to bear, was the knowledge that she had been stunned into accepting it. Why had she not wit enough to give way to the tears she choked down? Why had she not said on the moment: "Take the silly thing back, and get me something else." It was almost impossible to do it now. At least, she found that, whenever she sought words to suggest it, she could frame no beginning. The detested object of art stood on the console, and every time she glanced at it -and, of course, the thing exercised a malicious attraction-she wanted to dash it down among the fire irons and scream. It only made it worse that, whenever she looked at it, she encountered Felix Mallory's eves with that silly, mournful expression.

Once for a moment she thought she had hit upon an opening.

"Don't you think——" she said, and her voice strangled her. "Won't people think it bad taste on my part to put the photograph in a frame like that?" To do her justice, she was burning with furious blushes over the specious nature of her question.

"Don't let that worry you," said William Courtenay Bethune, with the utmost cheerfulness. He had thought of everything and was fully prepared for this. "No human being would ever suspect it was anything but brass and glass. I'll bet a burglar would leave it right where it is. You don't look for sapphires and tourmalines and such in picture frames. Why the deuce can't Anna keep enough boxes of matches around?" He went off to the library in search of one. There he paused for a silent gasp of laughter and a shake of the head. "Bill, you're sorry for the poor kid. You'll go soft and spoil Just you remember that rotter basking around here every day, except Saturdays and holidays, as it says on the time table. Remember his treating the town to the spectacle of his car parked every afternoon at your wife's door." He came back, pocketing a box of matches, with a heart as hardened as Pharaoh's.

It was a miserable afternoon. It rained and rained, and Peggy had a headache. Bethune spent his entire time in the workshop of the garage, putting new shafts into a couple of midirons, and getting orange shellac on his trousers.

Monday it continued to rain. Peggy wandered about the house, wondering if she were the same woman who had filled it with the sound of jazz and jubilance only two days before. She dreaded the advent of any visitors, and yet she was glad when Anna came to announce Felix Mallory. Anything was better than being alone. And none of her depression was his fault, after all. Or was it? Wasn't it a bit her philandering with Felix that was making her unhappy? Billy hadn't been one bit horrid about it. Still, some little difference had crept in. She didn't want difference creeping in between Billy and herself. Well, she would stop bothering about everything and go down and let Felix play for her. He was already at the piano in the music room, playing, of all things, the "Funeral March of a Marionette." What mood was he

She went down and, without inter-

rupting him, made herself comfortable in the lounge that faced the fireplace. Mallory played on. If she would not look at him, he would waste no wooing on her. What was the matter with her, he wondered? Friday night, that dreadful Friday night, had bored them both. Bethune was no fool! Well, he would try once more. If he could but kiss her once! But he could not, yet. It must be led up to, and skillfully. Then give him the one kiss, and he could slowly and expertly take the others.

He left the piano and came over to sit beside her. She welcomed him with a vague smile, which faded again as their eyes met. To his amazement, she began to look cross, intensely cross. As she looked at him, an expression of downright irritation and fury came into her eyes and lips.

She suddenly rose impatiently and walked over to the window. His dark eyes could never interest her again. So long as, they both should live, his eyes could never do other or more than remind her of that detested picture frame.

Felix Mallory was truly a sensitive, but a very Falstaff could have felt the discordant vibrations in the air itself about them. He sat for a few moments where she had left him, mastering his secret humiliation. She had utterly escaped from the patiently spun threads of the net he had been weaving about her. It was as patent as her wish that he were gone. Till now, it had been Felix Mallory who let the captive loose by tearing the mesh of his own making when he wanted to be gone after other game. Well, it was over, but there was one convenience, after all. His invariable exit would suit this dénouement, as well as any other.

His hands came down on his knees in a little slap of finality as he rose. Wordlessly he went to her side, stood for a moment, then lifted her hand and very gracefully kissed it. He kept his eyes upon her in a long, silent look, and a moment later she heard him leaving the house.

What an idiot she had been! Restlessly, she wandered out into the drawing-room, and cast herself into her chaise longue. But she remained supine but a moment. From the little console near by, the sad eyes of Felix Mallory gloomed at her from the jeweled frame. With an exasperated sob, she dashed at the hated thing and turned it face to the wall. Even in that irrational moment of action, she knew she could not bear the questions that might come if she did as she was tempted to do, wrenched the picture out and tore it to extravagant tatters. She fell back into the cushions of her lounging chair and began to cry like a penitent child.

It was the first relief her taut nerves had known for two days, and she wept herself into a feeling of deep exhaustion, and yet of greater ease. From this she passed, like any healthy baby,

into a sound sleep.

When she awoke later at a slight sound, William Courtenay Bethune was sitting quite near her, very busily at work on something in his hands. She looked at it. The jeweled frame was balanced on his knees, its more interesting side politely turned toward her. It held an old photograph of herself in her wedding gown.

"Billy!" she breathed.

"Hello, honey," said Bethune without looking up, "you've had a nap." He should never forget how hard it had been not to wake her with his kisses when he had come in and found her, flushed of cheek, with her handkerchief a damp wad in her hand and Felix Mallory forever eclipsed on the console! He finished fastening the back of the frame, and with a stretch of his body and arm set it back in its old place. Of

Mallory's large and expensive photograph there was no sign,

William Courtenay Bethune moved over and sat down on her chair at her side

"Look here, Mrs. Bethune," said he, "do you know that I rampingly adore you?"

"Do you, Billy?" Her voice trembled just a bit. "I'm glad. I should hate to love you hopelessly, you know."

He gathered her up in his arms with a hungry murmur, and she lay against his broad chest in utter contentment.

"I don't bore you, do I, Peggy?"

"I love you," said Peggy, in simple answer.

"You don't need other—people to keep you happy? I want you to have 'em, you understand, but, oh, Peg, I don't want you to need 'em!"

"You'll make me cry again in a minute," said a muffled voice against his

breast pocket.

"Not I!" said Bethune. "I'm going to make you smile. Look here! The bulk of the china pig—all but a trotter or two, say—went for this." With one arm still holding her, he fished from his pocket with his other hand something that glittered with sharp sparks of light. With a cry of surprise and delight she took it from him and held it before her eyes. But he took it from her again, and slipped the ring over her finger.

"Oh, Billy!" she said in soft delight. She turned her hand this way and that. "It's gorgeous. And so delicately set!

Just look! Just look!"

"I'm glad you like it," said he, kissing the top of her head. "I thought myself," said William Courtenay Bethune, "that it was pretty crude in spots, but you'll find the finish is exceptionally fine."



The Queen's Amber

By Marjory Stoneman Douglas
Author of "To the Lions," "Hibiscus Red," etc.



ADA JEREMY assured herself that she had never met a youth quite like Jimmy Martin. There was something unusually interesting about him.

It is not at all difficult to catalogue the kinds of men who singe their fingers at the laughing flame of Mrs. Theodore Jeremy, whom the most knowing at Miami Beach call Ada, whom the gods approve. Excluding the husbandly Theodore, who is not to be catalogued, being himself, their types are easily recognizable. There are the husbands of Ada's friends, who are her friends and therefore not quite so much in danger of dazzlement. There are the slightly heavy, important-seeming millionaire gentlemen, commanding servants, long gray cars, long white yachts, and high balls, not one of whom is past preening himself on any sort of achievement before the warm eyes of such slender loveliness. Of this lot only those noteworthy for especial brains or brigandage are allowed to amuse her. There are the athletes, hard-bodied, clear-eyed younger men, players of international polo, champions at golf or tennis, or dabs at aviation, who, if they dance and sport some small modicum of intelligence, provide Ada Jeremy's daily masculine fare.

And there are, of course, plenty of lacquer-headed, limber-ankled young dancers, down for a hurried campaign of devastation among the heiresses or the rich, sentimental widows. kind Ada indulged in occasionally, as one takes two lumps of sugar to a demitasse; quite unnecessary, of course, but a pleasing touch of surfeit. With odd lots of celebrities, successful writers, artists, magazine editors and visiting British peers, lonely husbands of celebrities and assorted yachtsmen, Ada did herself really very well in the way of beaux. -But she hardly met at all that other most interesting class of males, the hard-working young American business man, whose occupation, or even profession, promising as it is, hardly allows for strenuous and expensive winter playtimes in Florida. That was,

perhaps, one reason why Ada Jeremy found Jimmy Martin so engagingly different.

No one would have suspected him of being a business man, least of all a man in his unique kind of business. He saw to that. Ada Jeremy took it for granted, when some one first presented Jimmy to her, in the middle of a tea dance, that this tall, pink-and-white, grave-eyed youth, with the dignity of a diplomat and the unexpected smile of a cherub, as not just another athletic idler with a tang of something else about him. She liked him simply and directly, as was her custom, because he was so pink and white, because his tall body was so lithely youthful, because the bay behind the flaunting yellow Chinese umbrellas was so glowing and opaline, because the air was so soft, because the music was so gayly windblown, because—oh, just because she liked him.

But she liked him even more definitely because, when they moved to the polished cement under the feet of other dancers he danced, not as visiting celebrities dance, by the cold light of reason, or as the important rich, by sheer will power, but rather, holding her lightly, even a little impersonally, as if the music ran in at his ears and out at his heels for the sole purpose of making them both happy. They danced, like a single blown leaf before the soft surge of the music, pleasantly and appreciatively conscious of each other. that, with an interval for tea out of jolly yellow cups, they danced again, and people turned and said, "Who's that nice-looking boy that Ada Jeremy has now?" The mothers of daughters looked alert and interested.

Not one of them had any more idea than had Ada Jeremy what kind of hard-working young business man was footing it, a suave ant among tweed and linen-winged butterflies. He was not to be distinguished from them. He

had taken pains for that. Because, indeed, he was aptly affecting the butterfly not even by way of holiday, but quite sternly, as a matter of business. It was a pleasant profession that Jimmy had chosen, he often assured himself. It brought one into contact with such delightful people, people with whom it was a pleasure to do business. In fact, as he watched them, playing lavishly and expensively their elaborate little games, the point of which seemed to consist in the transfer of large sums of money from their pockets to other people's hands, he liked to think how their conduct did away with any twinges he might have had about certain phases of his own favorite vocation.

There was, for example, the little matter of business he had just terminated in Havana, just before his departure for Miami Beach. If he had not seen Mrs. Walker Hawthorne lose ten thousand dollars at the races without a murmur, he might now think of her with a touch of regret. As it was, he was quite cheery in the knowledge that Mrs. Hawthorne's remarkable chain of jade and diamonds was now well on its way toward bringing aid and comfort to the poor and the orphaned-Jimmy Walker by name. He merely congratulated himself on the carefully acquired technique which had enabled him to-is there a polite word?-to subtract that jade and diamonds from Mrs. Hawthorne's personal assets without cumbrous legal formality or any fingers of suspicion pointing unpleasantly toward himself.

The jade and diamonds were to be only the first item of his winter's work. So that you can see that it was quite in the way of business that Jimmy Martin, glad that so many pleasant people were learning to call him Jimmy Martin, had met Ada Jeremy on the edge of a dancing floor, on a particularly heavenly winter afternoon, and allowed himself the relaxation of dancing with her. But

even Jimmy, with his grave, blue-gray eye alert for business, could not have classed his pleasure in their first dance

as strictly professional.

Either the slender figure of her, in soft white, with a great taffeta cloak of hibiscus red rising about the smooth, smoke-dark hair, or the ethereal oval of her face, where the eyes were so strangely red-brown under straight black eyebrows, where the lines of the perfect mouth were an ache and an exaltation when they were not impish and zestful with the subtle joke of life itself, reached down into Jimmy Martin's placidly cold bosom and played merry Ned with his heart strings. There was intelligence and humor in those eyes of her, and a straight dignity about the body of her, and a flaring, exotic something about the two dancing feet of her, that went straight to the careful brains behind his cherubic countenance and almost scrambled Almost, but not quite. Jimmy could recognize frankly that this queeny dame had put the comether on him, without really distracting the full power of his mind from his profession.

He was not in the habit of allowing anything at all to distract his mind from business. It was too difficult a vocation. It is one thing to be a sneak thief or a safe blower or a second-story worker, dealing only in unidentifiable currency, negotiable securities, silver that can be melted, and diamonds that can be reset. It is quite another to be Jimmy's sort of expert and specialist. For he sought only, as a connoisseur would, the rare and the exotic, in gems and in setting, strangely beautiful mountings and carvings, storied jewels, as scarce as hens' teeth, and as recognizable in Paris and London and New York as a Botticelli or a Rembrandt. He had his methods and his markets, equally highly specialized. It took coolness and imagination and daring and ingenuity far above the average. That Jimmy prospered, was proof that he had all that. He took pride and joy in it. May not an artist know when his own

work is good?

He had begun, not so very many years ago, with a small matter of a curious seed-pearl-and-ruby ornament which he stole, if we must use the harsh word, from a visiting Indian prince, and disposed of to an Argentine beef king who never read American newspapers. That indicates something of Jimmy's technique. The Swazey emeralds, which disappeared from Cleveland not long after, became, within a reasonable time, the favorite jewels of the favorite wife of a high Egyptian official, although few but Jimmy knew how it was done, or how many dollars they brought to his transitory touch. The black pearls, which came so happily to be the chief of the collection of Amos Bushnell of Boston, lover of rare pearls—— But why go on? Those are all tales, but not this one. It is enough that Jimmy Martin, himself a connoisseur in certain things besides jewels, such as danger, found at Miami Beach something beside smooth stone and tight places to set a heavier pulse in his agile wrist. He had no place in his plans for his meeting with Ada Jeremy.

He recognized, turning the matter over in his mind later, as he was inserting in a dinner shirt very modest pearl studs which he had prosaically bought and paid for at a jeweler's, that he had better not let Ada Jeremy stick much in his mind. For the matter of business on which he had come would need every bit of that mind; not a cranny but what was clear and careful and alert. He reflected, studying his smooth pink-and-white face in the mirror minutely, as they who walk beyond the law have a habit of doing, that this job was to be the most difficult one yet.

But even as he was aware of that, and aware that he had hardly any plans at all worked out, he was rejoicing that nothing in his open and boyish countenance, which had never been photographed for any rogues' gallery, gave the slightest suggestion of the nature of his life's work. His forehead was broad and unwrinkled, his nose was straight and, if slightly stubby, indicative only of a necessary determination. His mouth was not grim or bitten or sinister or any other unpleasant adjective. The ruddy splash of color on his clear cheek was innocent and likable.

Only the droop of flesh at the corner of his eye, which hardly any one would notice, gave a hint of the secretive. It was a Chinese sort of droop, he reflected, rubbing his finger over it. In older and heavier men it was likely to be a permanent indication of glances that were not direct, of thoughts that slid and turned swiftly and retreated and were hidden before prying eyes. Surely she would never be able to read that droop. She had laughed full into his eyes, with that smoldering lazy glance that was like the sun shining through mellow, winy, ancient amber.

Amber! That was funny. Her eyes were like amber. But the adjective had been perfectly spontaneous. He wondered, with an unusual twinge, if there were any jinx in the fact that the eyes of this woman who had so stirred him were the color of amber. He was not given to superstition, holding that any belief in luck pieces or jinx or hoodoos or jonahs or pet aversions or pet incantations were only hostages to ill fortune, insidious cracks in an armor which must be fool proof. And yet it was queer that amber was the one word for her eyes.

For amber was Jimmy Martin's business in Miami Beach, and none of your popular common ambers, either. His objective was nothing less than the rarest amber in the world—carven, legendary, priceless. Miami Beach was only the approach to it, for Leonard Slade's huge house, like an Egyptian

fortress, massed itself against a surrounding expanse of water on his own private key many, many miles southward. An inner room behind thick cement walls guarded the Slade collection of semiprecious stones, all of them valuable for something beside the market prices of the stuff of which they were wrought, which Leonard Slade cared to display idly and gloatingly to a few occasional guests. Yet, because it was his greater pleasure to display them than to gloat on them in secret, limmy Martin was nosing casually among the throngs at Miami Beach, as a dog shark edges up behind a fleet of fishing boats.

Not that there was anything really casual in his coming, or any vague purpose in his mind in regard to the whole collection. Among Russian lapis and aquamarines in platinum and jades in hammered gold and carved ivories and rock crystals with onyx and fire opals and black pearls and balas rubies and tourmalines and moonstone and chrysoprase and matrix emerald, no matter how strangely cut or how richly embellished with history, which Leonard Slade had chosen for his unique collection, Jimmy Martin thought only of one thing. He wanted the queen's amber.

It was like him that he should. For that priceless group, carven earrings and high comb like a crown and necklace like winy frostwork, had grown dark as the purest amber will with the touch of forgotten centuries, smooth and half obliterated by soft hands long gone to scentless dust-that was an utter treasure. The radiant, clear, light gum, hardened how many ages ago no one knew, had certainly been carved in Persia into its rare tracery of leaf and flower and fine, fantastic beauties, by artisans in bazaars from which kings chose their baubles. The strong sun of Shiraz and Bokhara and Samarkand had warmed this amber to its richness, which had known the white necks of queens, the envious glances of concubines whose eves had also charmed Tamerlanes and Al-Rashids, whose days were not few.

The iced fire of diamonds, the dragon glare of emeralds, in themselves more precious, could not rival, for dim and lasting enchantment, the soft, strange color of the queen's amber weaving spells. Its name moved in strange places, on the lips of men who value strange jewels as other men value women, and more greedily. Perhaps Jimmy Martin, if he lasts, may become such a man. But at the time when he arrived seeking the queen's amber, and found Ada Jeremy, he was only the procurer of other men's chill delights,

Such a man he had met, a man unlike Leonard Slade who required audiences to his ownership; a man whose one desire was to brood over it in secret, to warm his aging eyes at its mellow, halfmuted fires, to soft his dry finger with its subtle touch. That was why there was no problem attached to marketing the queen's amber. Once fast in those smooth, agile, whitish hands of Jimmy Martin, and the precious stuff was as good as sold. But there could be no gloating on that in advance. The problem of putting his hands on it, hoarded and guarded as it was, was quite enough for him at present. It would take all that he had of quick thinking. And here he was, brooding, not on the queen's amber, but on a pair of eyes the color of it. Jimmy Martin shook his head impatiently and went out to dinner where, he hoped and intended, he could see more of them.

He could, and did. For Jimmy had worked with unerring judgment from the first. He had secured an introduction to a man who introduced him to a man whose wife knew every one, and recognized instantly in Jimmy one of those invaluable extra dancing men, obviously unattached, good looking, well mannered, living in the right sort of apartment hotel, driving the right sort

of car.

There had followed the tea dance. There had resulted Ada Jeremy's evident interest. Jimmy had stumbled, by sheer good taste, on the one person who could make almost anything possible for him on the Beach. Ada Jeremy had approved. Therefore the Beach was his. This dinner engagement had followed inevitably, and, equally inevitably, as far as he was concerned, he was allowed to drive Ada home later by various devious ways of his own choosing in that same unostentatious good car. It was smooth, swift work for Jimmy, but it was swifter for Ada. It was Jimmy who was slightly dizzy.

He had chosen to drive across the causeway to Miami and back, beguiled by the dark magic of the night which had made black glass of the bay far on each side the leaping lights of the causeway, black glass in which the low, white moons of the island bridges made stabbed white streaks, dazzling rows of them, and where in the nearer depths all the star powder of the sky was caught and drowned. The night itself was enchanted enough, in all conscience, as he drove with the wind in his face and the world all one blackness and brilliance, without the woman lifting her face to it beside him. He could glance at her exquisite profile and feel his pulses speed, as surely as if he had stepped on an accelerator.

There was something starry and remote about her. Her dress was mist colored, lit by little bluish gleams, subdued, rippling silver, that heightened his sense of her illusiveness, although her voice made her real again, a voice half a croon and half a whisper, wholly intimate. Yet even then Jimmy Martin was perfectly aware of the value of the huge aquamarine, like a congealed drop of moonlight hung from her throat by a silver thread, and where he could dispose of it at a nice little profit to himself.

He made himself think of that, over

and over, counting the dollars and cents to keep himself from growing more dizzy. He clung desperately to the humdrum of his profession to keep him from all sorts of moonlit insanity. Why, he could-why, this woman would have him selling real estate, if he did not watch his step. A woman to dream about, a woman to make every foolish, unbelievable glimpse of heaven seem as easy to grasp and hold tight as

-as the queen's amber.

Ah, the queen's amber! There was something definite and sound and practical to think about. Jimmy thought about it savagely, turned off from the causeway and its madness to the solid roadway and the approach to the husbandly house of this dangerous feminine thing beside him. He was glad she was married good and tight to a good strong husband. He was glad he was taking her there, as fast as he could go; glad he would soon be alone againand then there he was, like a fool, clinging desperately to her insidious hand. after the car stopped at her gateway and the moon and a pine tree made such beauty of her subtle face as turned his knees to jelly. Yet there she was, only a friendly, slender thing, patting him kindly on the shoulder.

"Such a happy ride, Jimmy," she was saying. The perilous thing was already calling him Jimmy. "I never, never saw such starlight. See where my husband's light is, the serious old sobersides, with never a glance for the sky, probably. I shall bring him an armful of starlight. dripping magic, and tell him such a nice boy gave me it. You are a nice boy,

Jimmy."

What could a level-headed jewel thief do with a thing like that? Of course, he tried to kiss her and she slipped away from him laughing, not displeased, and he shifted his gears savagely, getting away from her presence. Never again for him, he swore ferociously, on his way to bed. Never again on Miami Beach, while he had this other job cut out for him. He was through with women, Jimmy Martin was, and he was going to give himself forever and wholly to the engrossing technique of his art. He would now put his mind entirely on the matter of the queen's amber.

At ten o'clock next morning he telephoned abjectly to Ada Jeremy and begged her to lunch with him, ride with him, tea with him—anything, so that he could talk to her once more. That's the sort of person Ada Jeremy was.

Ada's voice, throat velvet over the unconscious wire, laughed lazily at his eagerness, and told him he might come for tea and not a moment sooner. And he flung himself out in his car to drive blindly across the causeway and south on the mainland, hoping for a glimpse, swamp jungle and bay-front estates, across open water, to the scattering rim of keys and that palmy one from which Leonard Slade's cream-colored Egyptian fortress rose solidly.

He saw it finally after he had stared at it for ten blinded minutes in which Ada Jeremy obscured everything. Even when he did see it, he was apathetic about it, as if within it there were only ordinary stupid chairs and tables, and no amber of any kind. From where he sat it was only a distant white patch against spiky greenness with the blue of water all about. He did remember that, however. His business head was not all numbed. Water lay on at least two sides of Leonard Slade's fortress. Then even that idea slipped from him and he drove fiercely back to the beach. in a fever of desperation lest he should be late for tea, as dreamy-eyed a pinkcheeked moon-calf as any one might wish.

The luck of moon-calves, in which Jimmy Martin scorned to believe, brought him to Ada Jeremy's door not a second beyond the appointed time. And just to show him what luck could

really do for him when it was working, whether he believed it or not, the first person to whom Ada introduced him, still flushed and inarticulate, was a huge, gray man, ruddy cheeked, bull necked, nodding stiffly at him from a wicher chair with eyes like dulled obsidian, dark gray, utterly blank and staring. A man with huge shoulders and the delicately pointed fingers of a Florentine Renaissance prince. A man with a huge, bulky body and a mouth under a gray mustache like a narrow red thread, morbid, nervous and uneasy.

limmy Martin continued to stare at him when Ada Jeremy spoke the man's name: Leonard Slade. Jimmy Martin, the cat footed, fell over his own feet making for a chair in a corner. They let him aione there, with his tea, and a headful of thoughts which moved solemnly round and round in his skull, like monkeys in a cage, holding each other's tails. He was Jimmy Martin. He had expected to work weeks for this. There was Leonard Slade. Heavens, how wonderful she was! Love is terrible!

It was at the last, and all-pervading phrase, where he stuck, bogged down helplessly in his own unaccustomed emotion. His eyes were not able to unfix themselves from their stare at Ada, no longer a witch in starlight, but a delectable woman in some sort of pale-green foam, the color of pistachio ice cream, adorable enough to eat, more heady because more tangible. He was aware vaguely of others, tea drinkers, chatterers, light frocks and white flannels, shadows between himself and the light. Even Leonard Slade receded to a familiar name and a dim bulk. The husband -was his name Theodore?-was an even mistier shadow. Why should Jimmy Martin worry about husbands, who gave so little thought to police?

The tea things were set in a corner of the long living room, and Ada poured her tea there, because they were dancing on the smooth tile of the patio. The light fell brilliantly against her dark head, outlining it as if against a background of pale gold, and gleamed on the silver and on her hands, engaged in mysterious rites among the cups and spoons, Jimmy stirred his own tea round and round, gazing at her from his corner shadows, hardly aware that the cool dimness of the long room was almost empty. He knew he was a fool. He writhed inwardly at his own idiocy, wrapping him in helplessness. It was quite in spite of his good sense that the light about her head looked like a halo, or that the lovely hands seemed put there to be snatched violently.

Then he started a little as if his eves had suddenly focused on a bulk that had seemed unconsidered furniture and now appeared as some one else in the room with them, some one by his very presence irritating. It was that Leonard Slade again, in another chair, much nearer the tea table, near enough-ugly on the edge of the light-to touch those hands. All of Jimmy Martin's brain snapped into his best alertness to record the astounding fact that Leonard Slade was looking at Ada Jeremy with the whole intentness of his slaty eyes, his huge frame inert and motionless, given over to fixity. There was something about the chill intensity of the man's face, focused on her eyes, that set a crawling hostility up Jimmy Martin's spine and rattled his tea spoon against his cup with his sudden grip. The man was speaking to her, slow, oily words in a slow, oily voice. She was-actually, she was smiling at him.

"But, my dear lady, Ada is no right name for you at all," this Slade person was saying, hardly stirring his narrow lips to do so. "What could they have been thinking of? For your depth and richness of charm, your marvelously unique coloring, the facets of your bewildering personality, something more exotic, more significant—— Now, I would call you, I think——" He leaned

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back to savor his own idea and Jimmy stalked forward to return his teacup, hovering, in spite of himself, where her smile could flash up at him. There was a wicked quirk in it, unmistakably for the huge man's lavish adjectives. He wasn't fooling her any. Glory, what a woman!

"Ah—I think—I shall call you 'Amber.' Now there is a name that means something in you, fineness, texture, mystery——"

Something snapped again in Jimmy Martin's business brain, the something that, many times before this, had seized at threads and turned them into rope ladders. Yet outwardly he was still the complete picture of the enraptured, slightly idiotic youthful adorer. He looked down at Leonard Slade and curled a boyish, insolent lip.

"Mrs. Jeremy," he said impetuously, "the gentleman evidently never saw much amber, or he wouldn't be giving your eyes such cheap and commonplace comparison. Now topaz, maybe—"

There was hardly a fraction of an inch movement of Leonard Slade's head, but Jimmy found himself staring into the flat surface of the coldest eyes he had seen in a long time. In spite of the brain that was now working keenly and efficiently, Jimmy was a little impressed by it. Ada Jeremy saw it, also, and caught her breath a little at the chill which passed between the two men. She thrust a consciously gay remark between them, and it fell as if encountering a smooth, hard surface.

Jimmy Martin's face flushed, but his eyelids were stiff and lowered. Within him a sudden hatred, cold as the huge man's glance, stirred and lifted. So this was the lump that owned the queen's amber, was it? And he dared to look that way at Mrs. Jeremy, did he? Very well. There were no longer any mists at all in James Martin's head. His hard, logical brain began to function, smoothly and inexorably, a cunning, intricate machine.

It was Jimmy Martin who broke the moment of strain, therefore, with a little embarrassed laugh.

"Well, but honest, Mrs. Jeremy, amber is so common nowadays. There isn't any romance left in it. If Mr. Slade wants another name for you, why doesn't he suggest something—oh, priceless?"

"Well, you see, Jimmy"—Ada spoke with a rush of relief that the moment was over—"you couldn't possibly know as much about amber as Mr. Slade does. He is a connoisseur of rare jewels, anyway, but, in addition to that, in all his collection the very finest is a marvelous set of amber so rare that it is called the queen's amber. I should be awfully flattered to be named for that."

"Oh, I—I didn't—I hope you'll pardon me, sir!" Jimmy spoke deferentially, as a very young man apologizing to an aged, aged one, a tone which did not at all warm the cold stare of Mr. Slade. "I really had no idea. My sister always says that about amber. But, of course, I——"

"Amber," Leonard Slade said slowly and contemptuously, and surely Jimmy Martin writhed under his tone, "can never be vulgar or commonplace, since, in itself, like a precious drug, it holds elements of strangeness and of release. Its warmth and its soft fire are always a little remote, no matter what common touch has dimmed it for an instant. And precious pieces of the finest, carved by artists who understand its nature, withdraw themselves from all contacts as if the power of such withdrawal, like the power of its attraction, were contained in its unique temper. That the ancients knew this and regarded it as of more mystic origin than mere hard stone, proves that this must be so. Long as I have been privileged to own the queen's amber, it is the sole part of my rather extensive collection which still somehow evades me, as if I were never fully to exhaust its resource, or too much savor its delight. Like pearls, perhaps, amber needs a woman's understanding."

The oily voice ceased to speak on this note of gallantry, and Jimmy Martin, holding his pose of round-eyed humility, sharply controlled the corners of his mouth. Pompous old donkey! And he thought that his amber evaded him, eh? Well, the man who was waiting to pay three times what Leonard Slade had paid for it would not feel that so strongly. Besides, he had sense enough not to talk rot about it, or to women. It would be an act of mercy to the lovely stuff to put it into the hands of some one who wouldn't be smug about it. This was a toad to be squashed. But not even the secretive folds of Jimmy's eyes gave hint of what he thought.

But as if urged by that thought, or by that still unacknowledged bit of luck,

Ada Jeremy said:

"You know, Mr. Slade, you've often spoken to me of your wonderful amber, but you've never let me see it. I think you promised, too."

Slade's eyes rested intently on hers and beneath his mustache he moistened

his thin lips.

"My dear Madame Amber, you see, I did not mean that I would merely let you look at it. I have long wished that I might have the extreme pleasure, if even for a moment, of seeing you wear it." Again the pompous pause.

Ada exclaimed softly:

"Oh, do you mean—it would be possible?"

"I feel that it could be arranged." Slade was heaving himself out of his chair now and stood, towering even over Jimmy's not ineffective height. "I feel that it should be arranged. I will arrange it."

"I would adore seeing it," Ada said, giving him her hands, which, to Jimmy's nausea, his narrow lips brushed. "And Theodore would be so interested, too. That wonderful amber——" And then that same lover's luck which had,

in so short a time, brought Jimmy Martin as far as this, gave him again an unexpected step up. For Ada went on: "And this absurd Jimmy Martin, Mr. Slade! I think he deserves a lesson in good amber, don't you? Perhaps a very, very few of us, who could be depended upon to be a rightly appreciative audience?"

Leonard Slade bowed stonily, flicking Jimmy with a glance. There was no doubt at all about their mutual, instinctive antagonism. But Jimmy did not show his.

"That, also, might-ah-be ar-

ranged."

After that Ada was heavenly to him for a brief bit, but the damage had been done. Jimmy was at last able to shove all his tender emotions into an unused corner of his mind, and allowed himself only the cold passion of his dislike for Slade. That was invaluable. It sent him, like a keen hound on a trail,

intently about his business.

That night he drove his car over the causeway into Miami, parked it on a side street, and, changing his dapper straw hat for a less conspicuous dark cap, went foraging for his needs. He found what he needed on the other side of the Miami River, a boathouse where they hired out small motor boats by the hour, Jimmy found he could get a small one, conveniently painted black, with an engine quite adequate to swift work in the darkness, and after careful instruction in the channels, which wind like water snakes among the sand banks and reefs and flats of lower Biscayne Bay, puttputted easily and swiftly down the river.

The last afterglow made apple green the stretch of sky overhead and the trees and masts; the houses and roofs of the west bank were velvet silhouettes against one long bar of sunset gold. But when he passed under the bulky shadow of the Miami Avenue Bridge, where ruby lights plunged, the tall coconut palms at the river mouth were black lacquer against a brief blue-and-silver twilight. Only the long darkness of the keys beyond the bay showed where the sea was, and the night crept.

Jimmy was too intent on his business to care that the first lights of the city to his left were lemon yellow, or mark the electric blue glare of street lamps among heavy tropic foliage to his right, as he spun his wheel and poked his small craft's stumpy black nose full into the lavender south. Only a few bluntbowed fish boats, chugging prosaically homeward, marked his going. And, as soon as he was working swiftly down the widening southward channel, only a white-cabin cruiser or two, with music on their decks, and one roaring speed boat with a feather of white at her stem, set him bobbing unnoticed in their wash. It was full dark now, dark with a few stars and a moon to come later: the only lights the glare from the city behind him and the lessening gleams of streets and houses to westward, on the receding land. His own port and starboard glimmers flashed on only rarely. The puttputting of his small engine was lost in the expanse of waters.

Out here in the rushing dark, with the spray of his progress flashing ghostly alongside, there was little left of the cherubic on the face of Jimmy Martin. The stern lines from nostril to mouth were drawn sharply. The eyes were hard clefts. The mouth was no longer pleasantly young. He was a different James Martin now, hard on his familiar and unlawful occasions.

Slowly he was able to swing nearer the line of keys to the left, working his way at half speed for fear of possible shallows. Once across an open cut, where the tide to the sea was setting strongly, the small boat labored and quivered under all the speed she had, but when the channel curbed directly close to mangrove-rounded shore lines he moved forward again more cautiously, slipping

from shadow to shadow, peering eagerly ahead.

At last a square bulk of building cut the sky straightly before him. The mangroves, almost at his left hand, gave way to the bristle of palm fronds. He moved forward almost in their arch, where bulkheaded banks gave deep water, black as ink. The channel widened slowly, curving to the left into a deep lagoon. To his right the bay was open water, hardly a shadow on the horizon speaking of the mainland. Directly ahead the great square house jutted enormously, terraced gardens with a long pergola reaching from it extending out into the deep water, gardens and palm trees, massed behind it, tied it to the mass of the land.

But from this side, as he had expected, the water lapped close under its high walls, a boat landing and steps leading directly to a high, arched entrance, where a great pierced lantern glowed. With just enough speed to give him steerage way, Jimmy crept into the shadow under the walls and followed that to the squared end of the garden, where the south wind blew strongly into his face; then down, clinging to the southern wall, until he was again under the higher masonry of the house itself, on this side sheer to the water's edge, with no break anywhere, except for a water gate over a ledge, locked and barred with iron.

Lights burned from a window here and there in the house, but there were few sounds in his ears except the lapping of water against the stones, and the constant rustling of the palm fronds, like wet silk. There were no voices that he could hear, nor any footsteps sounding from the terraces, nor any bark of dog. He stood, having shut off his engine, holding to the lower bar of the water gate, studying the whole surface of the masonry.

Then the moon came up slowly from the sea behind the black key jungle which curved away from the house wall, and southward, and he snapped the engine on and headed the small launch southward also, as fast as she could kick it. Well out of observation from the house, his hull black and invisible in the black-and-silver tumble of the waters, he circled back and shut off his engine again, falling into a long, brooding stare at the fortresslike structure across the water, full in the track of the moon, as his launch joggled easily to the lift and slap of water about him,

From here he could study the full front of the house, see how both north and south walls ran straight down to water, and make out clearly the light in the second-story window, the shelllike arch of window frames, the roof that was like a high platform, to which

an outer staircase led.

He sat and thought and rocked and thought, until only one light remained in the house, high in what must have been the master's bedroom, and then was put out. Only the light by the boat landing picked out the square black mass against the moonlit sky. It was considerably later when Jimmy Martin returned his small black motor boat to its dock on the shadowy river, found his automobile, and drove slowly back across the causeway, and to bed. He did not even allow himself to pass Ada Jeremy's window. He went straight to bed. And it is noteworthy of the state of his plans that, having wadded his pillow under his left ear, he plunged instantly into complete slumber, looking like a rosy boy who has been unusually good all day long.

Before the invitation to dine and view his collection came, by way of Ada Jeremy, to Jimmy Martin, he had concerned himself, now and then, with certain other matters. He sent a telegram. He received an express package. And he picked up, in Miami's colored town, a small, ingenious piece of African boyhood whom he taught to steer the same black-painted motor boat, rented by the week from the boat livery. They would depart up river, or down bay, with Jimmy lying comfortably on his back in the bottom of the boat, the little negro, alert with pride and responsibility, agile as a monkey at the wheel,

Sometimes the boat returned to the landing without Jimmy, set down at some other dock. Sometimes the small negro took the boat out by himself, presumably to pick up Jimmy somewhere, and returned with him, or without him, as might happen, until the boat people were perfectly accustomed to all sorts of vagaries on the part of either. The rest of the time Jimmy played moderately good golf with the always amiable, if inconspicuous, Theodore. danced, adored Ada Jeremy, and, in the abstract, continued to hate Leonard Slade with a cold and malevolent hatred. Every one said what a really charming person Jimmy Martin was. They hoped so much that Ada would not spoil him and break his heart.

In the matter of invitations, Leonard Slade had rather outdone himself. There were to be, beside the Jeremys, a tall, blond widow, Mrs. Moresby, who made a splendid foil for Ada's fiery dusk, the Sidney Tuppers, Marian Wallace, the sculptor, who contributed fame, but no particular good looks, and, as a tardy afterthought, Jimmy Martin. Ada gave him his invitation by word of mouth, looking slightly surprised at the irrepressible gleam of humor that merely flicked his eyes at something in the idea.

"Really, Jimmy, you won't be rude to him, will you?" Ada begged. "I know he's peculiar, but I am simply dying to see his collection. If you knew anything at all about jewels, you would have heard of it."

"Snaky old brute!" Jimmy grumbled audibly. "Let him stop looking at you the way he does then, Mrs. Jeremy. Why doesn't Mr. Jeremy object? The man's unspeakable. I don't believe I ought to go. Every time he kisses your hand I could choke him."

"Why, of course you must go, Jimmy. He especially asked for you, and you'll love the place, even if you can't get excited about his amber. I don't believe I could have made him promise to show it to us, if it hadn't been for your really dreadful break. Besides, I want you to go. Jimmy, please!"

Reluctantly, as a nice youth should, Jimmy promised. Mr. Slade was informed that Mr. Martin, as well as the others, would be delighted to accept Mr. Slade's charming invitation to dine and view his collection. Among the women guests, for whom the name of Leonard Slade brought much awe, gowns were chosen carefully. Jimmy had a special pair of evening trousers pressed, specially made, slightly full at the waist, according to the Prince of Wales. People who make fun of styles insist that such fullness makes it look as if the wearer could carry the kitchen furniture around with him if he chose. Such scoffings did not trouble Jimmy. seemed to believe that it was worth while taking such modes seriously.

It was on the same day that the trousers were pressed and laid on his bed, preparatory to being donned that very night, that Jimmy and his small colored boat captain went fishing. That is, they started out with full paraphernalia early in the afternoon until four o'clock, and caught one small mullet, which Jimmy killed and then did curious things to, with a pill bottle for the blood. At four, Jimmy stepped into his car from the vacht-club deck, and the small black motor boat, with its small black captain, putt-putted unostentatiously somewhere else. Jimmy spent a good two hours fussing in his room, scrubbing himself of fishiness, and concerning himself, in addition, with various small, unusual affairs.

But there was nothing of all this in his face when he presented himself, glowing pink and scrubbed white, immaculate straw hat, immaculate patentleather shoes, perfect smartness of black dinner clothes, at the Jeremy's front door at seven. Ada, already wrapped in miraculous white lace-and-ostrich cape, beamed upon him delightedly, waiting for the car. She thought then that, of all the youths she had met this season, Jimmy was the nicest. there was a touch of something unusual about him, too. Every one else thought that, evidently, to-night, and every one was especially friendly and pleasant with him, arranging themselves in the wicker chairs in the after deck of Leonard Slade's second largest yacht, waiting at the Flamingo dock to bring them sumptuously to dinner.

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There had been a superb sunset. Jimmy, looking pleased and happy at every one's kindness, tucking cushions behind backs, making a tremendous impression on the other women without allowing Ada one smallest question of his devotion to her, thought that he had never seen such clouds. As the great yacht halted for the draw and then picked up its smooth, steady rushing southward in the growing dark, he could see through the cut the white flares of wave tops where the sea stretched immense and luminous under the first cloud of stars. The brilliant deck lights beat back the night around them and made women-but especially wrapped in their gleaming cloaks, seem barbaric and legendary in the sharp glow. The men were only white shirt fronts and ruddy faces against the dark.

Some one said the moon would not be up until late. Jimmy Martin, perched on a railing, smoked a cigarette dreamily, his eyes on Ada's face.

Once some one shouted forward, and he looked down to see a small black motor boat, steered by a small black urchin, whose eyeballs and teeth gleamed in the vacht's lights, laboriously riding the waves in her wake. But that served only to take his eyes away momentarily, and his thoughts not at all. As if he had denied her to himself for too many rigorous hours, her rareness flooded back upon him, masking all his thinking with a deep delight. Then a great, pierced lantern glowed out of the sea before them, the yacht's engines slowed, there was a smooth, gliding landing, and Leonard Slade, under his arched doorway, with his great bulk and his dull eves and his delicate hands, welcomed them suavely, standing in the glare.

The dinner table was laid on the long, high-vaulted veranda that was half terrace, looking out over the garden and the pergola and the wide, surrounding sea. Bare clusters of flames from great silver candelabra, set on the lace-covered, polished table, hardly quivered in the still salt air. Behind that the great door into the living room was a huge, dark arch. Within, Jimmy Martin, as all the guests did, paused and stared and mur-

mured.

It was a vast cavern of a room, fully two stories high, wide as some dim, medieval hall, with pierced bronze lanterns here and there throwing lights and leafy shadows on walls of the strangest color in the world, walls a copper green the color of sea deeps, roughly laid, catching the light in broad splashes of dull gold. High overhead, huge beams were black. The furniture was black, velvet and hand-carved oak, emphasizing, not filling, that immensity. Beyond there were austere dressing rooms in lighter gold and a huge, soaring staircase in pure, ruddy, beaten copper.

Leonard Slade's guests, even those who knew it, felt its atmosphere anew. Jimmy Martin thought that his eyes must positively look round and bulging. The men waited silent, in the huge living room, while Leonard Slade busied himself with cocktails, from a great tray of hammered silver gilt which a servant

brought him. Marguerite Tupper and the sculptor, Marian Wallace, joined them, and Jimmy looked for Ada. Slade also must have been looking for her, for Jimmy thought he saw him pause in his cocktail shaking with his dull eyes turned to the door and his huge shadow fantastically arrested on the quivering green of wall behind.

Then she was standing in the stair-case doorway, outlined clearly against metallic shadows, dusky head bare and high, arms and perfect shoulders glowing in living ivory from a dress that was only a pale gold sheath, liquidly flowing from the suave curves of her breast to a tiny shimmering train about her ankles. Jimmy Martin caught his breath at sight of her. Hers was a very splendor of loveliness, exotic as this unreal setting, more tangible than moonlight, something more radiant than flesh.

As if she, too, felt the glamour about her, her cheeks were faintly flushed and her eyes gazed darkly, looking quite beyond Jimmy Martin, beyond Leonard Slade, with a faint challenge, a mysterious questioning. It must have been the sea, Jimmy thought, but when he turned to follow her gaze there was only the tranquil Theodore, gazing calmly, if with

eyes a little alight.

But Jimmy Martin wasted no thought on Theodore. Beside the loveliness of Ada, his eyes were all for Leonard Slade, eyes grown older and more impassive within their slightly drooping lids. It was quite evident to Jimmy that Slade needed no cocktails. Ada Jeremy was enough to have brought those almost purple streaks over his cheek bones, to have caused the slender Renaissance fingers to tremble visibly.

Then the dinner began, a lavish Florentine banquet, in which Jimmy tasted course after course of what might have been ortolans' and nightingales' tongues and cucumbers stuffed with seed pearls, for all that he was aware of it. Very much at the foot of the table, he could gaze up its brilliant length to Ada, softly glowing at Slade's right, like a thing of unadorned, intrinsic beauty heaped elaborations. From the point de Venise upon the bare, smooth boards, to the carved rock crystal of the table ornaments, where sullen, ruddy native orchids were strewn carelessly, to the endless procession, in the hands of negro servants in faded plum-and-orange liveries, the whole thing was fabulous, be-

yond belief.

Jimmy Martin, for all the training accorded by his own peculiar business in life, began to feel almost half as awed as he looked, half expected his great gold goblet to contain poison in place of champagne, and glanced furtively at his fellow guests to see if any were taken suddenly with premeditated drowse. Conscious of sea beyond brooding darkly, of great, vaulted sky preparing for the moon, and this brilliant glamour set theatrically below, they were all a little silent, savoring the same mood. And Leonard Slade, evidently very well pleased with its effect upon them, expanded more and more in the Medicean manner, voice more subtle, manner more suavely courtly, eyes leaping from face to face, recording and enjoying every reflection of effect. At the flushed awe on Jimmy's youthful countenance the flat eyes lost something of chill. As far as Jimmy really was concerned, it was as good as a circus. The more of this sort of thing, he thought serenely, the better for the success of his own small affairs.

After the lengthy dinner had found itself at coffee in tiny gold cups and cigarettes with exquisitely enameled gold holders for every one, the moon, rising behind them, made the sea a vast lake of quivering silver before their eyes. The table was completely cleared, the candelabra replaced upon a spread of silky white velvet. Even the pierced side lanterns were extinguished. The candle flames made an area of piercing whiteness with the velvet, which sprang out sharply from the surrounding night. The servants disappeared. There was a moment of pause, in which even cigarettes glowed quietly in silent lips. Smoke made a mist about faces, gazing questioningly at Slade.

Then one servant, returning silently, placed in the full light before their host a huge silver tray on which innumerable boxes rested, cases of faded leather, blue and plum and yellow and ivory, cut and gilded, boxes of tortoise-shell and boxes of painted parchment, small caskets of sandalwood and ebony, chests stamped velvet and tiny cases of mother-

of-pearl.

Jimmy Martin at the far and inconspicuous end of the table folded his hands with a sigh of relaxed pleasure, an air of relief which the banquet had not brought. A thrill of anticipated excitement passed among the other guests, The men threw their cigarette ends away and drew their chairs nearer. women's eyes gleamed with a certain greedy flare which even in Ada Jeremy seemed fundamentally uncontrollable. Leonard Slade deliberately reached for a box, opened it, removed from it a glittering, writhing something, put the empty box on another tray by his elbow, and began to speak. The famous Slade collection of unusual jewels, presented, as Leonard Slade best liked to do it, after an almost ritual feast and in the most dramatic setting, was now on view.

Introduced by a few explanatory words from him, perhaps, or passed from careful hand to careful hand in an almost breathless silence, with long sighs from the women and sharp exclamations of amazement from the men, there moved about that table, under the hawklike gaze of Slade and his one servant, a continuous stream of light and glitter and color and glint and flash. The white velvet was stained with broken facets of lights, clear flecks of

brilliance where a ring or a bracelet or a necklace was allowed to rest upon it.

Emeralds and aquamarines that had been a headdress for a Russian grand duchess, ropes of star sapphires that Napoleon had ordered for Josephine, pearls and pierced amethysts from the collection of a Venetian doge in the days of the magnificence, a necklet of raw turquoise, and gold lumps from the temple of an Aztec idol, ruby-studded gold nail guards of a Manchu empress, enamel butterflies with brilliants for the heads of Burmese dancers, pale jade of that rare color called "moss in melting snow," cut in frosty medallions, strange breastplates out of Persia in tourmaline and moonstone and agate, lapis lazuli from the Caucasus containing flecks of solid gold as big as peas, topazes like vellow diamonds, and opals, opals everywhere, handfuls of blue fire, drops of living flame on silver threads, ancient, rare gold coins made into armlets and anklets for the Ouled Nail, pale coral carved into earrings for delicate Renaissance beauties, chrysoprase, beaten silver, white sapphires—a bewildering profusion of beautiful things made priceless by association, made dramatic and vivid and precious by the artistry which had adapted them as ornament.

Leonard Slade was well pleased with the effect on his guests. Wherever a woman sighed over a ring or an anklet, wherever a man muttered with pleasure over a bold setting or a brilliant color, there his eyes flickered and were alert, gratified. His glance, under which a certain antagonism still lurked, rested with pleasure on young Mr. James Martin, engrossed and overwhelmed at the dark end of the table.

Jimmy Martin was enjoying himself hugely. In fact, he had secret ways of adding to his own pleasure as the precious things passed from the hand of Miss Wallace, on his right, to his own smooth, curiously knowing fingers. As each piece passed he listed it carefully, for future reference, in the catalogue department of his business brain. There was added to its photograph a careful figure, in dollars and cents, representing what he felt it would bring in his own peculiar market. Much of it which Slade valued, he let pass with an invisible sniff. Here some one had done the careful Mr. Slade very easily in the eye. There, Jimmy was delighted to note, he had lost much money. He was reassured in his belief that his host's conceit in his collection was greater than his knowledge of it.

On the other hand, over one small piece which Mr. Slade had mentioned casually, which had passed more swiftly from hand to hand, Jimmy lingered regretfully. Mr. Slade had called it a Burmese nose button of moonstone and silver, but there was something about it which led Jimmy to look closely at that moonstone. It was no ordinary moonstone. In fact, correctly cut and polished, Jimmy was of the opinion that it would seem a very fair blue diamond. In his private catalogue that item received a double star. If, later, some one came to purchase, out of sheer love of nose buttons, that moonstone? question was worth filing for reference.

When all the sparkle and gleam and glow had been placed by Mr. Slade's own hand in their several boxes, and the boxes instantly removed by the servant, there was placed on the white velvet of the table a single case of dull-blue morocco leather. Ada Jeremy leaned forward, her face exquisitely flushed, and whispered:

"Is it—at last—the queen's amber?"
Every one leaned forward to watch
Leonard Slade's hands, busy with the
lock—every one, that is, but Jimmy Martin, who was even more comfortably
slumped in his chair, on his face a mildly
expectant, polite smile. The hinged
cover opened slowly. Leonard Slade
turned it around so that they could all
see it, the several pieces within. It was

without any doubt the most remarkable amber any one there had ever seen,

Mellowed to a rich, red brown, like old honey or ancient wine, the light splashed deep golden shadows on the white lining of its case. The comb. carved into a feathery, lacy intricacy, seemed to glow with a light from within it, without sparkle, only a softened, pervasive burning. The massy earrings were the same exquisite fretwork, the neck chain a series of curiously linked motifs, each carved in a slightly different manner. The case passed from Ada Jeremy's clinging fingers down the table for a careful inspection, heads bowed over it, voices murmuring adiectives.

As it neared Jimmy Martin, Ada called out to him softly:

"Look at it carefully, Jimmy. You know you said Mr. Slade didn't know good amber."

It was light mockery, but, curiously Iimmy seemed hit Flushed, he looked at Leonard Slade, who was gazing at him with a satiric gleam. Every one, even Ada, was surprised to see how confused poor Jimmy Positively, he did not know where to look. Tupper said afterward that Ada should have helped him out somehow. Mr. Slade was really frightening. It was an awkward moment of suspense and emotion. Marian Wallace, with an impulse of humanity, passed the case to Jimmy suddenly. He started and reached for it with a confusion which every one understood. And then the dreadful thing happened.

For the queen's amber, case and all, barely touched by Jimmy's luckless hand, slipped, turned over, and fell, not on the table, but on his lap, on the floor, with a sickening clatter. With a horrified exclamation Jimmy disappeared below the table after it. And when the agitated servant had darted around to assist him the climax of disaster occurred. Somehow the luckless Jimmy bumped

his unfortunate nose, and came up slowly to the lighted surface, one hand clutching what he could of the amber, the other frantically mopping with a huge handkerchief at his nose, from which the blood had already stained it.

You could just see, as every one said afterward, that Jimmy was simply beside himself with confusion and misery. stood by, muttering apologies through the handkerchief at his nose, while the servant replaced the amber, luckily unhurt, in the case. Mr. Slade was even quite gracious about the accident and tried, by praising the beauties of it extravagantly and holding up separate pieces for better view, to put Jimmy at his ease. But he was still the picture of abject embarrassment, and his nose must have been bleeding dreadfully. There was even a broad splash on his gleaming shirt front. At last, while Mr. Slade was still speaking, he muttered his last apology and bolted outright, and they heard his unhappy footsteps stumbling up the stairs to the higher terrace, where the wind could cool his head.

Yet any one would have said, seeing him cross the roof to the southern wall with quick, hurried footsteps, that he was completely himself again. He was, only there was no one there to recognize exactly how completely. For, instead of paying further attention to his nose, he leaned over the parapet, staring straight below him into the moonlit waters. He waved once with that handkerchief, which was strangely fishy smelling, and smiled to see a little black figure below in a little black boat, faintly discernible, remove its hand from the bar of the water gate, and wave silently in return. What he did next, with a long cord and a lumpy-looking package, tied up in that handkerchief—a package that was about the size of a comb and a pair of earrings and a neck chain tied tightly-no one was there to observe. All that can be said is that he did not have any cord, or any handkerchief either, when Ada Jeremy came to find him there, leaning pensively against the parapet in the full moon.

All he was doing there then was letting the wind cool his flushed and now clean face, listening, apparently, to the night sounds and the diminishing puttputt of some motor boat, evidently on

its way to Miami.

Yet, considering the lumpy package, it is very strange that Ada Jeremy, moving toward him like a rare gold idol in full moonlight, was certainly wearing the queen's amber. Over her dark head the comb was a crown of subtle color, the earrings laid winy shadows on her velvet neck, the linked chain, across her shoulders, was, in the moon, a liquid glory. Jimmy did not seem surprised to see it. He only stared at the beauty of Ada Jeremy with breath that came quickly and eyes a little tired, as if excitement were quenched in them.

"You mustn't stay up here all by yourself, Jimmy," she said. "Is your poor nose better? Mr. Slade let me wear these to show you." And moving toward him gently, she touched his hair.

Any one with all Ada's experience should have known better. She must have known what she looked like, that way, on such a night. Yet she was a little startled to find her hands caught fiercely, and eyes not at all like Jimmy's usual mild ones, fastened upon her.

"Don't—do that," he said between his teeth, and then: "Heavens, but you're

beautiful!"

She shrank a little from the hard glitter in his eyes.

"That's nice of you, Jimmy," she laughed; "but it's the amber makes you think so. It's wonderful, isn't it?"

And then Jimmy Martin, whose conduct had really been most careful all evening, committed his one indiscretion. A bold, bad, knowing, boyish grin spread over his face. He leaned over and kissed her—oh, quite softly and tenderly—on the lips.

"You don't look at me the way you do at your calm Theodore, do you, loveliness? But I'm going to tell you something, just the same. That Slade donkey ought to be ashamed to put it on you. If I tell you a secret, promise not to tell? I was right when I said he didn't know good amber when he saw it. He doesn't. Every bit that you have on there—everything, is only a very clever copy of the real thing. They do these things well nowadays. There is a real queen's amber, but—but he does not possess it, see?"

The faint putt-putting of the distant motor boat was only a pulse on the wind as Ada Jeremy stared, horrified, at Jimmy. But she agreed instantly that it would be wiser to say nothing.

When Jimmy Martin left the Beach in a week or so every one said it was because he was eating his heart out for Ada Jeremy. Ada said he was the most unusual and interesting young man she had met that winter, and she was sorry to see him go. But Jimmy said nothing at all, considering that he had said enough, and having an important engagement in Rio de Janeiro, after calling in New York at a certain address for an express package, addressed in his own handwriting to himself. The only thing I should be interested in hearing would be the remarks of Leonard Slade, the first time a real expert in amber tells him that Jimmy was right.





The House in the Woods

By Berthe K. Mellett

Author of "Three Women," "Tide of the Tavenners," etc.

A LEXA GATES fled three things when she slipped away from Madame Padoni's drawing-room, and, throwing on the gears of Senator Hugh Wellington's roadster which stood in the driveway, shot off across the Q Street bridge and made for the Canal Road leading from Washington toward Virginia.

Just beyond the bridge she thought for a moment that her speed had attracted the attention of the law as the put-put of a motor cycle disturbed the night behind her, and in her present mood she welcomed the chase. But the fiery machine turned into a side street, and, descending one of the sharp Georgetown hills toward the Potomac, was gone. She heard the obstreperous engine again as she swung onto the clanging chain bridge spanning the river, but it was ahead of her, and tearing off, hell-bent, into Vrginia. If there was a chase afoot, some bootlegger and not herself was playing the leading rôle, and her thoughts came back to herself and Jimmy Carruthers and Hugh Wellington -and Marie Padoni.

Climbing the hill beyond the bridge, she found herself proceeding through an avenue of parked cars. Under every tree they stood, their red tail lights amorously declaring an apparently endless line of petting parties which, impatient of the supervised Speedway in town, had come to sanctuary in the more

individualistic atmosphere of the Old Dominion State. Though the blood which flowed in Alexa Gates' veins had had its source in a particularly cantankerous old framer of the Constitution, and though the dogma of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness had been the strong meat fed to her along with the sterilized bottles of her babyhood, Alexa Gates could not find it in her nature to extend much sympathy to such of her countrymen as sought self-expression through the agency of hermetically sealed side curtains. Shooting intolerantly forward to escape them, she found they had preceded her and encamped themselves as far as the eye could reach. Leaving the pike, she turned onto a meandering dirt road and, after passing an encouragingly diminishing overflow from the highway, finally had the world to herself.

She was of the caste which likes to have the world to itself, which demands it, and, to a very large extent, collects on the demand. Now with nothing but the moonless night around her, and only the strangely persistent explosions of a motor cycle coming to her from a distance, she halted the car and filled her lungs with the scent of honeysuckles sweeting into bloom along a fence beside her. Only when country coolness, dropping from the trees above and rising from the meadow beyond them, laid its hand upon her, did she realize that she

had come with neither cloak nor scarf. In the lights of a late town-going Ford that suddenly materialized out of the ruts of the road and rattled flippantly past, the gold tissue of her gown flamed momentarily, and the jeweled bracelet upon her wheel arm became a circlet of fire. There was a broad streak of practicality in Alexa, and, counseling with herself that the least-efficient thing she could do, under the circumstances, was to invite some prowler to add a tangible factor to the amorphous problem that troubled her, she unclasped the bracelet and dropped it into a pocket of the car.

Muffled into the beat of an unrhythmic tom-tom by intervening trees and space, the drill of a motor cycle engine vibrated against her ears. Shifting her position and centering her senses upon the perfume of the honeysuckle, she tried to shut it out. She could not. Like a bur shot from a long-range repeater, the thought of Jimmy Carruthers lodged in

her consciousness-and hurt.

"How about it?" Jimmy had inquired that night with the first breath he drew after arriving unforgivably late at Marie Padoni's table and being seated beside Alexa. "Want to harry some poor old fuddy-duddy of a regular preacher out of his bed after this shindig is adjourned? Or shall we wabble quietly over to Alexandria or Fairfax Courthouse and throw pebbles at the windows of a mere J. P.? There is a drug store up at the corner that keeps a doubledecked motor cycle hitched ready for night calls, and I 'tended to the license this evening-why I'm late. Say-there is the slickest old church in Fairfax on the right hand side of the street-"

"There is some very slick new fish on the left-hand side of you," Alexa interrupted coolly. "You might take a portion and let it pass on to others. When people are late for their dinner engagements the least they can do is not to keep their hostess' butler standing at attention longer than is necessary."

Crimson shot up to the borders of Jimmy Carruthers' crinkly red hair.

"That was a nasty one," he muttered over his whitebait. "You don't seem to realize that I've got a lot on my mind. Preparations and preliminaries. Can't you get the idea through your head that you and I start for Persia to-morrow to build a railroad for the shah—magic carpet lines having broken down something fierce since the government took them over? If you'd been on the job, like you ought to have been, and married me a week ago, we wouldn't have been rushed this way at the last minute."

"I've told you a dozen times that I

am not going to marry you."

"Yes; and I heard you the first time -but you can't fool me." Jimmy had recovered his manner again and was attacking his plate with the unimpaired appetite of youth and vigor and abounding confidence. "Not that I rate myself the John Barrymore of the nation's capital, from the effect of whose slender grace and profile no woman is immune. What I figure on in this case is nature's first law-old man Self-preservation. you don't take me, old Ironsides will get you." And Jimmy shot a telling glance at Hugh Wellington on Marie Padoni's "Think of listening to senatorial right. thunders for the rest of your life-"

"If you can't speak decently of my friends——" Alexa began, but Jimmy was not to be chivied off his own line.

"That, however, would be your own private tragedy. The point that touches the public is—the Padoni. She gives the best dinners in Washington, but, unfortunately, good dinner giving is dependent upon a calm mind. And, if her affair with the Iron Duke goes blooey, how is the multitude going to be fed?"

A shiver went down the fine, sensitive nerves of Alexa's body, and revulsion blurred between her and Hugh Wellington, diagonally across the table. Marie whom she loved—Wellington whom she admired! Direct from the cantankerous old constitutionalist came horror of furtive things, of relationships unsanctioned by the law. She looked at Marie, and for a moment she read the meaning of the haunting black eyes which had been upon her all evening. Then Hugh Wellington laughed and leaned toward

her, and the blur was gone.

"You are in a mood again to-night, Alexa," he said, and was amused. It was one of many disarming things about huge-framed, iron-grayed Hugh Wellington that the moods of his friends—and also his foes—were subjects of study to him and sources of entertainment—and profit. The emotion of a moment before became anger in Alexa. Anger at Jimmy Carruthers.

"If there is any danger of the multitude going unfed in the future," she said to him, "hadn't you better let yourself be served with pheasant now, while

self be served with pheasant now, while it is being provided? You know you can't afford luxuries for yourself."

She had meant it to sound exactly as it did sound. She had meant to sum up in a single conclusive sentence the whole case between herself and Jimmy Carruthers. He was poor, and he must be made to understand that he was poor, and exactly what that meant. He hadn't a thing in the world but a nne old name. and the breeding of a gentleman, and a sister in college to support. She had meant her words to be as cutting as they were final. But Jimmy grinned. He resorted to his familiar and aggravating method of passing over her references to his finances. Even more than his calumny of her friends, this angered her. She turned from him to the man on her right. Not until the guests were rising from the table did she speak to him again. She had meant to say an icy good-by and nothing more. But, even as she opened her lips to speak, she felt the strange, aching tug at her heart which Jimmy had, somehow, always aroused in her since their school days. Under the old, unnamed pain the straight smile of her lips softened, and she held out her hand.

"Good-by," she said; "I know you will like Persia."

"Don't let that worry you. We're sure to like it," he answered casually.

"What's the use of talking to you at all, Jimmy, if you can't be made to comprehend that I mean what I say—that you are going to Persia alone? Absolutely alone. I am not going to marry you. And now run along and get your things packed."

"Pack my things in ten minutes," he grinned. "It's you that's going to take

time."

She left him. She simply fled. Marie's haunting eyes followed her—eyes with some strange, compelling question in them. At the door into the hallway she brushed against Hugh Wellington.

"Sorry!" she stammered. She was more nearly in a panic than she had ever been in her life. That brief contact with Wellington had dispelled her last remnant of poise. "Golf links all day!" she lied. "Nose shines—powder in the cloak room."

It was not until she was beyond the doorway and had cleared her brain a little with a long draught of the night air that she knew what she was going to do. She saw Wellington's car, and the idea came to her with a promise of relief. She decided to take it for a few moments and get away from Jimmy with his continued and unreasonable assurance of her, away from Wellington, away from Marie's strange, questioning stare. Signaling the door man that it was all right for her to do so, she stepped into the parked machine. Wellington had come that night in his roadster. He alternated between a limousine and chauffeur worthy of his estate, and a low, rakish car that he drove himself. A roadster-around which strange rumors hung. It was said that it had been built to order for the navigation of bad roads, and that its function was

that of connecting link between the capital and a mysterious house in the woods. The house in the woods—so the political vultures of the opposing party claimed—was an extra-political institution provided by Wellington for meetings which might prove embarrassing if held in the Senate Office Building. Odors of oil and packing plants and harbor contracts were mingled with rumors of that house. Wellington met men there, so the aforesaid political vultures averred, who dared not show their heads in Washington.

Upon such of his friends or foes as had rallied the temerity to ask questions about the house in the woods, or to apprize him of the rumors current in the gossip of Washington, Hugh Wellington had bestowed the answer of his particularly benevolent smile—a smile which said that he understood and really sympathized with the vagaries animating the

rest of the human race.

It was this feeling, that Wellington understood and sympathized with vagaries, which led Alexa so unhesitatingly to his car when she left Marie Padoni's house. If thoughts can be said to pat one on the shoulder, Wellington's thoughts seemed to pat Alexa and tell her to go ahead—as far as she liked—take whatever of his she pleased—make any disposition, temporary or final, of his effects.

"I'm fifty," he had said only that afternoon as he sat in her drawing-room at tea; "more than twice your age. But a man doesn't mature sufficiently to give the right understanding and love to a woman like you before he is fifty. Trust me to understand you, Alexa. Trust me to know that whatever you do is right."

She was thinking of his words and drawing comfort from them as she sat in the car under the trees and felt the revivifying incense of the honeysuckle penetrate her being. But from far off there came the annoying detonation of a motor cycle, and, stepping on the starter, she whirled the wheel and

headed off into a path, branching but dimly from the road.

The little car, adjusted with the delicacy of an instrument and snubbered to a nicety, took the humps and hollows of the path like a creature that had been trained to it. She began to enjoy herself immensely. Branches swept low against her face, leaving trails of dew behind them. Her breath came deep and full, and she drew it between her teeth set upon the delicate smiling fullness of her lower lip.

She made a mile, two miles, three, by the register upon the dashboard. A map of the country began to present itself in her capable mind. Somewhere ahead, not too far, she would come upon the other Leesburg Pike. After the steadying effect of her drive through the forest, a swift roll homeward on the mac-

adam would be pleasant.

And then, just as she was beginning to be a little anxious for the pike, her engine gasped and died. She knew the symptom accurately. The last drop of gas had been drained from the tank. She sat where she was and reconnoitered. She had not noticed before but now she saw that she was under a heavy, overlapping arch of elms. Elms planted in that wise spoke of civilization—of a dwelling place. Instantly as she thought of that, she switched off her lights. In Virginia one does not attract more attention than necessary when considering a descent upon shy dwelling places. Even the most intrepid dry agents go armed and in numbers, since certain types of Virginians are noted for defending themselves and their domains not wisely, but too well.

Straining her eyes through the elms, Alexa surmised a clearing and some place beyond it a house. If only the moon would arise, or even a star come out with a prick of light in the dark-

ness

She had about decided to leave the car, and go forward as silently as pos-

sible on foot, when she heard the beat of an engine ahead. She was nearer to the pike than she had thought. gallon of gas would carry her to one of the filling stations with which modern life has decked all open highways. She listened for the direction of the sound, heard it sputter, and stop. Then came the whirling scurry of a car turning and making off. A taxi-it had sounded like a taxi-had dropped a passenger and gone. More and more her location looked like a rendezvous for the thirsty. She did not leave the car immediately, but sat waiting and thinking. was a step ahead. The sound of some one approaching on unsure feet. crunch of gravel, as though a path had been reached. Heels on wooden steps. The click of a key in a lock—the swing of a door-

And then, so close that she almost cried out at the surprise of it, an oblong of light, as a match was struck back of a window. The wavering glow of a candle behind drawn curtains.

The curtains reassured her. By the quality of the light that filtered through, she surmised the quality of the curtains. She was of the same world as the purchaser of those curtains. Under the protection of the fraternity of caste, she stepped down from the roadster, casting about in her mind to place the owner of She must know him-and the house. vet who of her friends lived off the beaten trails in Virginia? Some recluse, perhaps, whom she did not know-unless through his writings, his music, his other contributions to the arts. began to picture him. He was slender and tall and with an upstanding brush of gray hair. He smoked a pipe. He had been for a nocturnal prowl-perhaps, even, to the theater in the city-but had returned now and was sitting with his books and probably his dog in that dark room where another light now shone.

Feeling her way carefully over the grass of a lawn, which, invisible as it

was, still manifested its careful care and culture, she was about to set foot upon the steps of a wide porch when once again she heard the drum of an engine—not a taxi this time.

Not one to break in rudely upon the arrival of a guest was Alexa Gates. Moreover, she was beginning to enjoy herself immensely with her imaginary recluse. She had just passed a rustic arbor with a honeysuckle over it; feeling her way back, she found it and sank onto the bench under its shelter. She would wait until the visitor had gone. There must be no third party to ruin her interview with her hermit. Taking out the cigarette case which she had thrust into the front of her gown upon leaving the table at Marie's, she struck a light.

Steps sounded, first on the soft dirt of the path, and then on the gravel of the walk. She tamped out her cigarette. Dimly now, against the faint light from the house, she distinguished the outlines of a man. A large man, muffled in a coat. He came to the steps and had made a step or two toward the porch when he paused.

"Who is smoking?" he asked in a low voice.

Alexa did not answer. She could not. She knew the voice, and with recollection of it back had come, tumbling, all the trouble from which she had fled. The man on the steps hesitated for a second, and then came forward directly toward the arbor, and trained the cone of light from a flash light into it.

Alexa's gown flamed. The gold band upon her head became a coronet. Wellington snapped off the light.

"So," he said, "this is why you left. It is a good sign, I suppose, that you spy upon me already—quite conjugal. I'm sorry that I do not appreciate it."

There was no toleration of other people's vagaries now in either his tone or his words.

"I was not spying," Alexa answered

sharply. "I took your car and came for a ride. The asphalt was lined with petting parties, and I took to the woods. That is all."

"Oh!" It seemed to her that he breathed easier. "I see." And after a pause: "Sorry I can't invite you in——"

"I only came for gas. If you can find a gallon or so in the house and bring it out to me, I will go on."

He seemed to be considering something—testing and weighing it.

"I have a better plan than that," he said at length. "I had intended making this trip in the small car to-night, immediately after leaving Madame Padoni's. But, as you know"—he laughed a little, in a muffled, nervous way—"I took the large car and the chauffeur. But, as I have never let even my most trusted employees know of the house here, I left Wilkins at a branch of the road beyond there. I think you can follow the trail without difficulty, even in this inky darkness. Wilkins will take you home. I would gladly go with you to the road, but—"

"The party whom you expect has already arrived," Alexa said.

"What?" His whole consciousness seemed to whirl upon her and ask the question.

"The man for whom you are waiting has already come. I saw him go into the house. I did not see him—"

"Oh!" His breath escaped in relief.
"And now, if you will take my coat and follow this trail to Wilkins—"

She turned her shoulders to the snug warmth that he laid over them and stood for a moment with his arms half around her.

"You realize, don't you, Alexa, that I could be the villain in the piece and blackmail you into marrying me at once?" He laughed in smothered geniality as he said it. "You are alone with me, in the dead of the night, in a place that has kept the journalistic minds of the national capital filled with disquieting

surmise for years. My dear Alexa, you are now on the grounds of the house in the woods, and you are there with Hugh Wellington. You, the one woman in Washington against whom there has never been the slightest breath of scandal——"

It sounded rather nice of Hugh—that jest—because it was so absolutely a jest. Confidence in him became an active, bubbling emotion in her. His tact—his restraint—his arms already half around her and yet remaining only half around.

"You are a dear, Hugh," she said. "An absolute dear!"

"Thanks, Alexa." He dropped his arms. "That is a great deal more than I am generally supposed to be. Perhaps, after all, I may take the time to walk to the car with you."

"Thanks! But don't, please, don't. I came out to be alone, and I'd rather."

He stooped over her hand and touched her fingers with his lips. He waited in the arbor until her feet had left the gravel path, and then turned to the house.

With her feet on the trail toward Wilkins and the car, Alexa remembered one of the tenets of her class.

"Don't do anything questionable," it ran, "but, if you do do anything questionable, for goodness' sake never let a servant get wind of it. Never give a servant anything even to whisper about."

She had not done anything questionable, but still Wilkins might whisper. The hard, protective wisdom of women of the world spoke to her. No, she wouldn't risk even Wilkins. She would go back to the roadster and, snug in the warm coat, wait until Wellington's conference was over and his guest departed. Then she would again apply for the gas he had denied her, and go on her way.

She had sat in the darkened roadster for an hour when the door of the house opened again. Once more she tamped out her cigarette and waited. The lights behind the curtained windows were out now, but she could distinguish two figures on the doorstep. A tall one and a short one. They spoke. Wellington gave directions about the steps, and the other answered him. This guest was not a man—it was a woman. It was Marie Padoni!

Following an instinct that nullified on the instant her trained distaste for things furtive and hidden, Alexa slipped from the car. The elms at the far side of the path were meshed and knitted together with vines. She got between them and stood within three feet of the roadster, not daring to go farther lest the rustling of her garments, or the crack of brush, should disclose her hiding place.

The two came toward her, the man straight and tall, the woman small and bowed as though with weeping. A bird, disturbed in his rest by Alexa's presence, scolded in a sleepy twitter. Through the distance came the put-put of a motor cycle.

"Are you sure you can drive this?"
Wellington asked as the two reached

"I can drive anything, Hugh—you know that." She was struggling with her sobs, swallowing them back. "But come with me, dear. Just this once more, come with me—as though we still were friends."

"I tell you, Marie, it's useless to prolong agonies. Once a thing is decided upon, it's done and over with. I'm as sorry as you, but—"

Methodically he had turned on the dashboard light in the little car, and helped Marie Padoni to the seat under the wheel. Then he went around to the other side, swung the door open, lifted the flap of the pocket, and extracted a flat emergency tin of gasoline. Anger with herself for not knowing that Wellington would have such an emergency tin, for neglecting to discover it for the

need she had had, flashed over Alexa, and then burned up into a sort of furnace of wrath against Wellington that, knowing he had such a provision, he had not apprised her of it. Then together and on the instant both furies froze into gratitude for his oversight and hers. Otherwise, she would not have known that it was Marie who had gone into the house; she would not have surmised the unspeakable things that she now surmised. She shuddered as she remembered the flood of confidence in Wellington which had overswept her.

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As the tin of gasoline came out of the pocket, something else—something that flashed brightly in the light on the dashboard, came also, and dropped onto the floor of the car. Swift as the swoop of a night bird the woman at the wheel was upon it.

"Ah!" She raised her voice in foreign shrillness and held up Alexa's jeweled bracelet. "So-now we know at last! So-then we must discount to their proper worth all those stories of political advancement with which you have regaled us this evening. one's house-must one? Clean out little Marie Padoni, eh? And for what? To let Alexa Gates in. So that is it, is it? Fool that I was to believe you-to hearken when you said that our love must be sacrificed on the altar of your public duty! But I did believe you, and I laid myself upon the cold stone of separation and waited for the knife of our parting to descend. But now the truth comes out, and the tragedy of Marie Padoni becomes the farce of Alexa Gates. Out of the pocket of your little roadster car comes the truth that turns the laugh of the world upon Marie Padoni-

"For Heaven's sake, Marie—they can hear you in Fairfax."

"And let them hear, say I! Let them hear! Better shrieking story from me, than a whispered scandal from the world."

"Listen to me, and try to control yourself a little. That trinket—"

"Oh, it's that trinket now, is it? If is not a bracelet that every woman in Washington knows, and covets. You think I do not know the jewels that flash at my own dinner table? At my own dinner table-this very night she sat at my dinner table and ate the food that I provided for her. Ah, do not think I have not watched her before, my dear. I have seen her fine, cool condescension to you; I have watched you with your eyes upon her like the eves of a beneficent father confessor bestowing everlasting blessings. Father confessor-bah! Icy condescensionthat rides at night to a house in the woods with a man who loves her, and who waits until he disposes of the lady who is already troubling his house before he lets her in!"

"If you don't keep still, Marie--" "What, Hugh-what? What will you do to me? Stop my mouth as they stop the mouth of the screaming heroine in the movie? No, I do not think you will do that. You will not give me cause to come into court with my complaint against you. Law-what is the law that is should let me suffer the hurt from you that I am suffering now, and only give me redress if I can show a blackened eye or a broken bone? Swept out of your life-rubbish to be swept out of your life, that the garlands of Alexa Gates may be hung over your door. Diana, she is called in Washington-the chaste Diana! Hah! So chaste that she goes about her amours only when even the moon is hid! To-night-only to-night she sat at my board-and listened as coldly as a lady of ice while that boy Jimmy Carruthers made love to her. Quietly she left my houseso quietly that she omitted even the decency of an adieu to me, her hostessor was it possible that even she felt the shame of her treachery, and could not look me in the eye?"

"Will you please quiet yourself, Marie? This is a lonely spot, but broadcasting——"

"Where is she now? Where is she? Tell her to come out of her hiding place that I may tell her——"

"She is gone. She left an hour ago." "Left an hour ago? Ah, very likely, that! Very likely, indeed. If my heart was not so full of tears, I would laugh at that, for it is one of the best that you have ever told, my friend. And, if she had left, why would you not drive back to the city with me, as I pleaded that you should do? No, you said, in accents as heavy as the clap of doom, no! What is finished is finished, Marie! But, that I may be spared possible twinges of remorse in my happiness with my new love, here are certain moneys. I would give you stocks and securities, said you, but such things are traceable, and, in the great enterprises for the nation upon which I embark, it is better that I have none of that which is commonly alluded to as a man's private life. I took your money, lest remorse should sometime assail you, Hugh. I took it, that, manlike, you might fold your hands sanctimoniously whenever you thought of me and say into your own smug ear: 'Ah, but, at least, the little Marie has no complaint, since she was so generously paid for the love of her heart-""

"Listen to me, Marie, and try to get some sense into that head of yours—if you can."

Having stood helplessly through the torrent of her words with the can of gasoline dragging at the middle finger of his left hand, Wellington now cleared his decks for action through the simple expedient of retiring to the rear of the car, emptying the contents of the can into the tank, and flinging the empty container to the side of the road. So intent was he upon summoning the heavy artillery of his best senatorial manner, that he did not notice her sudden silence,

her soft, catlike shift of position, the adroit slip of her hand under the flap of the tool pocket, now covered by her cloak.

"I did lie to you," Wellington announced portentously at last. "That is, in the story I told you, I left out certain factors, fearing they might hurt you. I was honest when I said that the time had come for me to clean house. From now on I must be irreproachable. There must be nothing in my life, private or public, that can be used as a weapon by my political enemies. You may answer that I have always had political enemies, and that I have always kept certain things from them with fair suc-But a time of great activity on the part of my enemies is approaching. You know the man I am backing. With me behind him he will be president, if neither of us make any slip. always talked things over with you, Marie, and I have always found you trustworthy. I am about to confide in you again-buy my continued security in you by the very importance of this last secret that I give into your keeping. When my man is elected I am to take an ambassadorship. I must have a wife to grace an embassy."

Under the cloak Marie Padoni's hand tightened upon something, but her voice when she spoke was the relaxed sweet

voice of a tearful child.

"But, Hugh," she said, "I am fitted to grace an embassy. No woman in Europe or America has had better training than I to assist you in the life you intend to lead. I have lived in capitals my entire life. The great folk of earth have sat at my table for years. Wait a little, Hugh-wait for me." Her hand still hidden under her cloak, she moved toward him. Her voice remained soft, but her words came fast, with quickening breath. "Wait for me! I will divorce Padoni. It is possible, at last. Since the revolution in our country the laws are less severe on women."

"I am going to a Catholic country, Marie. A woman with a divorce behind her would not be an asset in a Catholic country."

"Then choose another country, dear." She was leaning toward him now, across the door of the little car, rising a little from her seat, moving her hidden arm free from some encumbering folds of her cloak. "There is England. In England the divorces of Americans are looked upon as amusing characteristics of the race."

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"I am not going to England, Marie. There is nothing in England that I want. I am a practical man. I can't romanticize even about the court of St. James. In the country I have selected there are certain undeveloped resources—certain concessions to be obtained——"

"Hugh, you are being comic with me." The gentleness of her voice broke in sharp, hysterical laughter which was immediately controlled. "You are trying to make me think you utterly base. You are not utterly base, are you, Hugh? If you are not, then listen to this other plan. Go to the country you have chosen, and wait for me. I will come. We will conduct ourselves there as circumspectly as we have done here. Go, Hugh, and wait—"

Her plea hung in the air with the vibration of a string that has been touched and still sings after the hand of the player has been removed.

"No! I am going to marry Alexa Gates at once."

Her knee was on the seat of the car now, her small body braced like the body of an athlete.

"Then it is finished," she said quietly. "Good-by!" She held one hand toward him in the darkness. He turned it and bent over it until his lips were in the palm. Her other hand, clear of her cloak now, swung out and above the roadster top.

From beyond the hedge of trees a woman's scream pierced the night like a needle. The hand that had swung so resolutely beyond the car dropped. And, with the weight of a descending sledge, a monkey wrench fell impotently from it to the running board. Moaning pitifully, Marie Padoni crumpled upon the seat which had braced her, and covered her head with her cloak. Up the road toward the pike a motor cycle drummed hysterically for a moment, then came to a stop and was silent.

Like a man at whose feet a meteor has plunged, and who yet doubts his escape from death and seeks further evidence than his own consciousness to persuade him that he still lives, Hugh Wellington felt for the murderous implement and stood turning it around and around in the dim glow of the dashboard light.

Then suddenly, convinced of his safety and disregardful of the wailing woman in the car, he stepped to the side of the road and shot the gleam of his flash lamp into the trees. Below the coat which swathed her, the border of Alexa's gown became a little running line of fire.

"I had not thought this of you," he said dryly and ominously.

"I didn't eavesdrop—I tell you I didn't!" The calm Alexa Gates of drawing-rooms was gone now. The woman who tore her way through the vine-knit screen of trees was a weeping and terrified girl. "I changed my mind about the chauffeur; I was afraid he might say something about my being here at night; I came back here to wait until you—until you—"

Inside the car Marie Padoni's wailing had ceased abruptly. Now her small face was thrust forward and her small hands were fumbling frantically at the lock of the car.

"You!" she panted. "You! You sat at my table and ate my bread——"

Wellington laid a firm hand over hers on the car door.

"Keep still, Marie!" he commanded. "Keep still?" she shrilled. still? Oh, yes, that would be very nice, would it not, if Marie should keep still? Unfortunately, you reckon without your Marie. She likes her bit of gossip as well as another, does the lady to whom you have said, 'I am finished with you;' does the woman whose food the chaste Alexa Gates eats in order that she may deceive her the more entirely. Your hand may be strong, Hugh Wellington, to hold me now in the car, lest I tear the golden hairs from her perfidious head. But what hand was ever strong enough to stifle a wronged woman's tongue? To-morrow the first tinkle that the telephone rings in Washington shall be the signal that I am telling a choice story over the wires. 'You think Alexa Gates is cold,' I will say. 'You think there is nothing that can be said about her. Listen to me, my dear friend,' I will say. 'You have heard of the mysterious house in the woods of Senator Wellington. Such rumors as you heard of it were of such uninteresting things as meetings of men, or arrangements that had to do with politics and spoils. You were wrong. I have seen the house in the woods. It is a nest prepared for the chaste Alexa Gates---'

"To-morrow," Wellington cut in, "such news as is carried over the telephone of Washington about Miss Gates and myself will convey the news of our marriage at daybreak in Alexandria."

"You are assuming a great deal." Some of Alexa's familiar chill had come back into her voice. Wellington turned his face toward her. It was stern in the dim light from the dashboard, as stern as a face cut from stone.

"I am assuming only the obvious, Alexa," he said. "It is the one way to destroy the story which Madame Padoni says will break in Washington with the first ring of her telephone."

"But you will deny the story. I will deny the story—"

She paused. In the darkness she felt, rather than saw, a smile upon Hugh Wellington's face. Horror and fear of him swept over her, carrying away such feeble defenses of calm as she had been able to raise.

"You mean," she whispered, "that you —you threaten me—that you would not deny the story?"

"Denials of such stories are so much breath," he said.

"But—but—then you are blackmailing me!" A cry almost as shrill as the cry of Madame Padoni came from her.

"If you care to name it so, do it," Wellington answered.

She became small and horror-stricken and beaten before him. Her height seemed to shrink. There was a sound upon the trail ahead-a stealthy, swift sound as of some one approaching. But neither of the three in the feeble glow of the dashboard light heard it. were intent upon each other, focused upon the combat between them. Even when a man became a denser shadow leaving the shadows of the trail behind him, Alexa did not hear his step or feel his presence. But Hugh Wellington both heard and felt the coming of an intruder and faced him grimly.

"Oh, there you are, Alexa," said Jimmy Carruthers nonchalantly as he came into the faint circle of light, wheeling a silent motor cycle. "Good girl to stand still while I was gone." Then, as though he had just become conscious of her presence, he bowed to Madame Padoni. "Golly, I'm glad to find you here, Marie, Apologies to make, Alexa and I beat it out of your house to-night without the usual farewell powwow. You see, we were eloping, and got a little rattled. Are still, for that matter -both eloping and rattled. Headed for Fairfax Courthouse, and, being in a hurry, we naturally took a short cut and got lost. I went ahead to find the road and-"

"Very likely, my friend." The hands

and eyes and voice with which Marie Padoni gesticulated were equally hysterical. "Very like that Alexa Gates would elope on a horse like that——" hu

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"Necessity makes queer traveling equipment. Anyway, Alexa's practicing up for camel touring. Hop on, Alexa, and show the lady how you take the bumps." He steared the unwieldy steed. "Oh, by the way"-he gave the straight, compelling command of his eyes to Wellington-"we'll leave it to you to send out our announcements tomorrow-by telephone. As for wedding presents, you might inform our host of friends that we intend to bring back our own rugs from Persia, and that any objet d'art we covet, we'll save up and buy for ourselves. Come now, Alexa, don't waste any more time."

Obedient to his order, weeping as openly and gratefully as a lost child come to refuge with a particularly trustworthy policeman, Alexa Gates got onto the rear seat of the machine. Jimmy swung his leg over the frame, and thrust down with his foot upon the reverberant starter. To the tune of explosions that seemed to be rending asunder all the trees of the forest around them, the bridal party shot forward upon its way.

"Oh, here's your coat!" called Alexa. Neither voice or words carried over the clamor of the machine, but Hugh Wellington's coat flew backward and settled like an enormous bird upon the trail.

The chill of coming day bit sharply at Alexa's shoulders, and she drew herself forward into the shelter of Jimmy's back. It was nice there. It was nice to be alone and close to Jimmy, flying along on disjointed, exciting wings. She began to dream of camel trains and Jimmy—elephants and Jimmy—Persia and Jimmy. She blew a little happy farewell kiss as they passed the startled chauffeur in the limousine at the entrance to the trail, and headed down the pike for Fairfax Courthouse.

With the first pink streak of day a

country bumpkin emerged from his humble cot, milk pail in hand, and stood staring at the golden apparition which went flashing noisily by. He had never heard of Aurora, yet now he saw her, and his jaw dropped open in wonder and belief.

"Jimmy!" Alexa had to shriek to him he said.

through the wind whistling over his shoulder. "How did you happen to come?"

At the imminent risk of both their necks, Jimmy Carruthers turned his head and kissed her on the mouth.

"Oh, I was just put-puttering around,"



FIRST EMBRACE

THAT you should come again, as on that day
When first you sought me out with golden dare,
Saying: "My friend, my lover, my despair!
How shall we know surrender in delay?"
And I say: "Let us, instant as we may,
Go white to our desire, as though with prayer"—
Words so perfect, they made the summer air
Gladsome with song as from the far away.

Yet now I wonder, can there ever be A rapture sacred as the first embrace? Once there were lovers indolent in Thrace; Once there was wonder written in the sea. So every second hour of undebate, Following on the first, must come too late!

GUSTAV DAVIDSON.



Hitchcock

By Frances O. J. Gaither

Author of "Cousin of the Moon,"

"The Screen," etc.



HE drowning see their whole lives. And those who, also with full consciousness, come to die in other ways-do they, too, see life whole in one glimpse? I wonder. Hitchcock, in the moment which he himself had decreed should be his last, saw only one fragment of his life. But he saw that fragment with such infinitude of detail, and with such hard, brilliant edges, that it was very much as if it were expanded to the scope of his life, or as if his entire life were squeezed into those few hours, even into that last tiny moment. It was like seeing a dark shore raked by a searchlight. It was like looking through a powerful lens at a dim star.

Through the lens of understanding Hitchcock looked at last, with sadness too keen to bear, upon the picture of himself in perfect content sitting down to lunch the day before—sitting down to lunch at his club as he had done any time these twenty years. Poor Hitchcock! Ridiculous Hitchcock, about to be thrown into a fuss and a stew by the absence of the waiter he was accustomed to!

It really was ridiculous to care like that about a waiter. The waiter was a chap called John; a gray, arid little chap with tremulous lips and watery eyes; a mere cipher of a man. But, the fact was, Hitchcock was accustomed to John. For twenty years John had been filling

Hitchcock's glass with unobtrusive but dependable solicitude. Why, the fellow had been more stable than brick or stone walls. No matter how often the club had moved farther uptown, John had continued an integral part of Hitchcock's comfort. "Well, John, they may move and move, but they don't separate us." "No, Mr. Hitchcock. We stick, as you might say."

Actually, Hitchcock had grown to be fond of the faithful fellow in an exaggerated, preposterous sort of way.

"Why, where is John?" he demanded of the upstart who filled his glass on Tuesday at lunch time. And he noted that he felt absurdly uneasy. "Not sick is he?"

"Oh, no, sir. He was here this morning, sir, just as usual. He was called away, I think."

Hitchcock smiled at his own unreasonableness then. He even jollied himself a little while the upstart smoothed the clean service cloth and laid knives, forks, and spoons like toy soldiers lined up for attack. Well, make the best of it, Hitchcock. Try ordering your lunch alone and unaided.

He picked up the menu. The upstart stood at attention. But a disturbing thought occurred to Hitchcock. He put the menu down.

"Called away, eh? No trouble, I hope. No bad news?"

"Beg pardon, sir?"

"I was speaking of John. It's so extraordinary he should go out before lunch time. Why was he called away?"

"Really, I don't know, sir. The lamb

chops are very nice."

Hitchcock liked nothing so much like mutton as lamb is, and he detested above all things to be hurried. But in his abstraction he let the man who served him in John's stead bully him. And he was presently eating lamb chops as hastily as though he were on a wager to be done in a quarter of an hour.

He did not, indeed, dare to pause until the two chops were almost naked. No, he'd be damned if he'd eat the paper frills. Dessert? Of course, he wanted dessert. No pastry. Not an ice. Pudding? Well—he hesitated and then, feeling the upstart's eyes upon him, decided swiftly—yes. And coffee. And ask the headwaiter to come here, please.

Hitchcock leaned back in his chair. It really was a pity that anything, however small, should disturb his comfort in his club. He wasn't a man who asked a great deal of life, and he did like his lunch hour at the club. In his own home he'd always played second fiddle to Winnie. Well, that, perhaps, was as it should be. A good many men play second fiddle to their wives. And at the office there was David. was a good son. In fact, David was a wonderful son. Hitchcock ought not to mind playing second fiddle to a son like David. And he didn't mind, of course: not much, that is. Only it was a bit of a relief to come here to the club where this fellow, John, this waiter, looked up to him so-

Rose the picture of John gently stroking the service, even marshaling the lead soldiers like legions to do Hitchcock's behest. John's every gesture was solicitous and soothing. John's veyes brimmed with loyalty. John's voice was deferential. It was the same whether he was suggesting what Hitchcock should eat, or whether it was he,

on the contrary, who sought Hitchcock's judgment. "I don't want to bother you, Mr. Hitchcock. I don't want to presume on your kindness. But you've helped me so many times, sir, I don't feel I can take a step without your advice."

The last time John had asked Hitchcock's advice it had been about money. John had thirty thousand dollars to in-

vest.

Just imagine that, will you? Think of a waiter rolling up a sum like that out of his pay and tips, the tips of Hitchcock and others, bits of silver left in a little metal tray. John wasn't a mere cipher of a man, after all. Thirty thousand dollars! The fellow was worth a fortune, but even when he spoke of it his voice was modest and deferential and his hand filled Hitchcock's glass as carefully as ever.

"By George, you're a wonder, John."
"Oh, no, sir. Not at all, Mr. Hitchcock.
It's taken me quite a long while, all my

life, as you might say."

And all these years every time John had laid a dollar up, he'd promised himself he'd one day ask Hitchcock how to invest it—just the same as he had asked Hitchcock's advice that time he'd had trouble with his landlord and the time his boy had been run over by the automobile. For twenty years John had never had a thought but that Hitchcock should tell him how to invest his savings when they should reach thirty thousand. This final proof of John's devotion quite bowled Hitchcock over. Confound it, the tears came in his eyes every time he thought of it, as now.

"It's taken quite a while, Mr. Hitchcock, all my life as you might say. Will you just take it and place it for me,

sir?"

The head waiter broke in on Hitch-cock's musings. He said he hoped Mr. Hitchcock had no complaint to make, but he said it as if he were sure Hitchcock had!

"What's the matter with John? Why isn't John here?"

Hitchcock knew he sounded peevish, but the fellow needn't act so all-fired patient and long-suffering.

"I'm very sorry, indeed, sir, but John asked to be relieved for a little while, only an hour or so."

As if Hitchcock begrudged John his hour or so! Oh, well!

"But it's so unlike him," grumbled Hitchcock. "Do you think he had bad news of any sort?"

The head waiter could only shake his head inconclusively and proffer the too-patient assurance that John would be on duty as usual to-morrow. Meantime, he did hope Mr. Hitchcock would mention anything that was wrong. Perhaps the pudding? Oh, damn the pudding! True, Hitchcock had pushed it away after one mouthful. True, it was a slabby, clammy pudding; not in the least the sort of dessert John would have set before him; but—

"Oh, the pudding's all right," Hitch-cock said crossly. "Have some one bring me a paper, will you? A fresh edition."

When the paper came he struck it open and turned the pages quickly. He turned to the market page. His unpracticed eye lost itself in bristling fine type. Crucible Tin. Confound it! Why couldn't he find Crucible Tin?

Echoed: "Your confidence touches me, John. It does that. But you see I've always been too busy with my own line to pay much attention to markets." Hitchcock could hear himself saying that and could hear John in a dead voice: "I don't mean to presume, sir." Oh, confound it! John's arid lips had trembled, and his dull eyes had brimmed. "If it's not convenient, Mr. Hitchcock—if you're too busy, just forget I asked you. I wouldn't presume on your kindness."

A thicker-skinned man than Hitchcock mightn't even have noticed how hurt John was. That was the whole trouble, indeed. Hitchcock was too sensitive. He had been unable to blind himself to John's hurt. And that John should be disappointed in him after all these years had been an idea intolerable. That's all.

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Well, here it was, in fine type. Here was the quotation of Crucible Tin. Thirty-eight! The stock Hitchcock had advised the waiter to buy was fallen to thirty-eight. Cold sweat prickled Hitchcock's face. He let the paper fall upon the rejected pudding. He pushed his chair back.

At least, Hitchcock had persuaded the simple fellow to put in only a part of his savings for a starter. That was something. Yes, indeed, that was something. Hitchcock caught at that fact and strove to believe it was not only something but a great deal. He even thanked God for it.

Although Hitchcock was in no sense his waiter's keeper, he did thank God that he had advised John to put only a fraction of his little fortune into Cru-"He'll be grateful to me cible Tin. for that," said Hitchcock to himself as he went out of the dining room, and, by George, he should be! "If it hadn't been for you, Mr. Hitchcock, I'd have lost it all," he'll say. Well, well, good old John, faithful fellow. How he did rely on Hitchcock's judgment. afraid you exaggerate my powers, John; I'm afraid your affection for me preiudices you." "Oh, no, sir. Oh, no, Mr. Hitchcock. I've had my eyes on you for twenty years. If a man don't know who's his friend after twenty years, the fault's his own." Well, well! Poor old John! He'd be cleaned out this day if he hadn't trusted Hitchcock.

Hitchcock met John just outside the checkroom. John's gray, dry cheeks bore two round, dark-red spots. And, of course, his street clothes made him look different. Hitchcock had never before seen John in any but the decent garb of service. The cheap brown coat

John wore gave him a pushing, vulgar look. And when John asked Hitchcock to lend him a fantastic sum of money, there was no trace of modesty or deference in his tone. His voice went shrill. It was a wholly strange voice, almost inhuman, squeaky like a talking doll's. Hitchcock felt as though he were answering a stranger.

"But, my dear fellow, you don't realize! I can't raise such a sum at the

drop of the hat."

No more could he. He'd have to mortgage his business to raise such a sum. People don't let a man have thousands at the drop of the hat without gilt-edged security. And, even if Hitchcock could get the money, what security could John, the waiter, give?

With logic rushing to his lips, Hitchcock found himself unable to speak naturally to John in his present state. John's voice grew shriller and shriller. Two men, pausing at the check room, said good day to Hitchcock and looked

at John curiously.

"I've thrown good money after bad, Mr. Hitchcock. I've had to. And this morning my broker called for my last cent. If Crucible Tin doesn't stop dropping, it'll be cruel hard, sir. I've no one to turn to but you. The savings of a lifetime. Carrying a tray isn't so easy when you do it year in and year out." John's lips were shaking. He fixed dog's eyes on Hitchcock's face. "I've believed in your judgment for twenty years, Mr. Hitchcock. And you know I kind of leaned to Crescent Motors, but you were so partial to Crucible Tin. You won't go back on me, Mr. Hitchcock? If I'm in danger of being wiped out, you will stand by me." The poor fellow took hold of Hitchcock's coat. His eyes held fast by Hitchcock's. "You won't go back on me after me trusting you more than I'd trust myself?"

Obviously the answer to make to John was: "Believe me, I'm very sorry for

you, John, but it was not my judgment that you should risk all you had. Nor would it save you for me to plunge into that whirlpool. Besides, my business—which, by the way, is a far smaller business than you suspect or I would dream of owning to you—is less mine than my son's, in point of moral control. Why, the truth is, John, I wouldn't dare tell David I want money for such a purpose!"

But Hitchcock didn't make the obvious answer. He couldn't bear to see the trust and devotion fade out of John's eyes. And so he said he'd see what he could do, or something like that; murmured vague and soothing evasions, and somehow at last loosed John's grasp

from his coat.

The next day was Wednesday. On Wednesday Hitchcock forsook the habit of years. He did not have lunch at his He had lunch at the Blue club. Dragon. He had his lunch there because he suddenly realized he could not be comfortable at his club. Not that Blue Dragon, by Hitchcock's standards, was a comfortable place to have lunch. Heavens, no! But it offered itself as an obvious alternative when he stood on the pavement outside his club and found himself unable to go in. He stood on the pavement below the high stoop and looked up at the familiar windows and found he simply couldn't go in.

Ridiculous? Of course! But there it was. He had come at exactly one o'clock, as he had come any time these twenty years, to the door of his club, only to find he couldn't go in. But it was his lunch time. He was a man of habit, was Hitchcock, and so he was very hungry at one o'clock. Often enough, he had seen the silly story-book sign of the Blue Dragon opposite his club. Turning his back on the familiar high stoop now, he looked across the street and discovered in the Blue Dragon the obvious alternative. He went over,

But he didn't like the place. He didn't like the three steps going ignobly down, instead of twelve sweeping majestically up. He didn't like the twilit, subterranean impression he got even here upon the sidewalk, or the din of voices and rattling crockery. He liked to eat lunch quietly under lofty windows. Most of all, he didn't like the treble notes sounding in the din. One expects to play second fiddle to women at dinner, but at lunch—

Hitchcock, hesitant under the sign-board creaking on its theatrical cross-arm, was, in spite of his hunger, on the point of repudiating the Blue Dragon after all, when across the street a door opened and a man came out on the stoop. He was a waiter chap, his black garb of service a bit green under the full sun, the napkin on his arm blowing about in the breeze. He stood searching the faces of the passers-by. He did not see Hitchcock, because there was a great deal of traffic just now. But in a moment he might. So Hitchcock hurriedly entered the restaurant.

The idea of death did not come to him recognizably for hours yet, but some premonitory breath blew chill upon him as he dodged into the underground lunch room. Fancy eating in places like this forever and ever! He shivered and knew he should not be able to touch the food. His lip felt bedewed as in nausea. In fact he thought he was stek. "I shall be really ill, if I have to go on forever eating in places like this," he said to himself. "I'm not young enough to forage around."

But the outer air refreshed him—no one stood on the stoop opposite when he came out—and he stepped quite briskly up onto the pavement. Air! That was it. They should let air into these places where so many people eat together.

The second wave of—well, call it sickness; it was more like sickness than anything else—engulfed him in the sanc-

tuary of his own office behind the frosted-glass barrier which bore his name. It came upon him with no warning.

David had been delivering the gospel of progress and expansion, and Hitchcock, who didn't really oppose the Chicago branch of Hitchcock & Son, had been temporizing.

"But we might need that money for something else, David,"

He was, of course, thinking of the waiter John's emergency, but naturally he couldn't tell David. If he should mention that an investment he had advised was in danger of turning out badly, David would say: "You advised! Great Scott, dad! Who in the world asked your advice about investing?"

David was half sitting, in that vigorous, hurried way of his, on the edge of Hitchcock's desk. He was swinging one foot against the desk. The desk was made of metal painted to look like David's foot made a hollow. drumming sound against the metal. David's strong, beautiful fingers whitened and reddened at the impossible task of bending an inflexible ruler. But David restricted the expression of his impatience to his hands and one exasperated foot. He kept his voice indulgent when Hitchcock temporized.

In the moment after Hitchcock spoke, John Godowski was announced. David, annoyed at the second interruption to progress, wondered who the devil that could be. For a single breath so did Hitchcock. He knew no Godowski. Then he realized. John Godowski: John, the waiter!

Hitchcock pictured him in that brown coat which gave him such a pushing, vulgar look. He heard echo of John's shrill, new voice. He fancied the reenactment under David's half-quizzical eyes of the scene of yesterday outside the check room of Hitchcock's club.

Only this time the scene would be acted in a different key. John would be

more frantic—oh, much more—and Hitchcock could not be so reassuring, could he? Hitchcock could not, in David's presence, speak those soothing, half-promissory evasions, could not say he'd see what he could do. And almost surely it was too late now to say: "Let's not cross bridges till we come to them, John. If you're to be a business man, you'll be having that to learn."

"I-I don't feel well," said Hitch-cock suddenly. "I don't think I feel

like seeing any one."

David said:

"Why should you?" And: "Miss Lathrop, tell the man my father's out. Tell him Mr. Hitchcock's playing golf at Greendunes."

Greendunes is beautiful upon a spring afternoon, with blooming orchards like handfuls of popped corn sprinkled on the edge of the spreading golf course. The sun comes warm through the soft mesh of a man's wool jersey. Drifts of white cloud hang still against the enameled sky like painted surge on painted sea. And close beside the tenth hole a particular young apple tree against the dark curtain of a distant wood poises a curved mist of bloom like fluffed skirts. It is scarcely too much to expect the rooted trunk to pirouette and set its frills ballooning.

Greendunes is a beautiful spot, but Hitchcock's pleasure in it was not as usual. It was at Greendunes that he recognized that—that sickness for what it was.

As soon as he saw the boy with the salver coming toward him across the green from the clubhouse he knew him for John's emissary.

He had an instant, incredible vision of John in his strange, brown coat pushing his way into the country club, demanding in a shrill, wild voice that Hitchcock be summoned from the links.

"I've no one else to turn to, sir. I'll be wiped out, if you can't save me. But you'll stand by me. The savings of a lifetime. Carrying a tray isn't so easy when you do it year in and year out. Twenty years I've called you friend, if I may presume to say so. You won't go back on old John, Mr. Hitchcock."

Standing on tender grass beside a tree which almost danced with life, Hitch-

cock thought of death.

But it was only a telephone call, after all. Hitchcock took the slip of paper off the boy's tray and read the number of his club in the city; read: "Godowski. Urgent." Hitchcock crumpled the weak-voiced scrap of paper in his palm.

"Tell him I've gone," he directed the boy with the salver; and: "No more this afternoon," he said to the snub-nosed caddy, and waved them both in ahead of him.

Then he turned and looked once more at the tree with its fluffed-out skirts.

Hitchcock's home was the expression of his wife's many-faceted superiority. No one could have guessed from Hitchcock's home how small Hitchcock's income really was. none of Winnie's friends had so little to do with as Winnie. Yet only Winnie could achieve such a house. Winnie had a dozen talents where ordinary people have one. In middle age she had kept herself slender and sleek. new way she had her hair cut showed the shape of her fine head. Every day Winnie wore more overpoweringly that air of distinction, capability. Everybody noticed it, spoke of it. If you want a thing perfectly done, ask Winnie.

Hitchcock got a moment alone with Winnie right after dinner. He said he'd like to borrow her quarterly allowance for a few days. He tried, hearing incessantly echo of John's shrillness, to keep his own voice low and careless. He must not say to Winnie, "I cannot go on living unless you do this thing."

"You're so clever about keeping a bit to windward," he praised her. "Oh, as to that," said Winnie, tossing her shapely head so that her earrings flashed, "I do that by not lending!" She laughed at his chagrin. "Don't look like that, my dear. I'm joking. If you and Davy need funds—the Chicago branch is definitely decided on, isn't it? I thought so. Of course, I'll lend to you for a crisis in the business. Not there, Jackson, not so close to the window—"

She interrupted herself to rebuke the new butler, whose painful breaking in was three days old now. She turned her back on Hitchcock and gave her whole attention to the exact placing of a card table while Hitchcock continued the dialogue in imagination: "The loan is not for the business. It's for me to try to tide over a waiter chap on an investment I advised." "An investment you advised! But, my dear, how absurd!"

"Now," said Winnie turning back to him, "now you can go ahead. I've made many a silk purse of sows' ears, but this Jackson does seem to be the most hopeless material. When do you and Davy want this money, how long shall you have to have it, and what security do I get?"

Hitchcock said: Oh, never mind. He mightn't ask for it, at all. He'd only wanted to make sure she could manage if he should ask.

They were a family party at bridge: Hitchcock and Winnie and David and David's fiancée. They sat about a card table in an intimacy which, supposedly, would repeat itself down through the years after the wedding next week. Nobody else was there. And yet, as Hitchcock played, an alien face was always before him, a gray and arid face, a face with tremulous lips and watery eyes. Sometimes he saw it mute with devoted solicitude; sometimes he saw it open-mouthed, and heard its shrill voice, and saw the flush of fear on the thin cheeks.

Hitchcock knew now that it had been futile to run away from John and to refuse to speak to him on the telephone. John would not be put off. By the very might of John's doglike faith in Hitchcock's power to make things right, John would go on seeking him: at the club, at his office, at Greendunes, even here. When it should all be over and John's slow-piled fortune irrevocably swept away, still he would go on seeking Hitchcock. "You were so partial to Crucible Tin, sir, and I trusted you more than I did myself."

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When the butler announced a telephone call for Hitchcock, Hitchcock heard with that sense of fatality in which there is no room for hope. He knew that, in the end, he could avoid John in only one way. But, as if mechanically, he tried another. He said he was not at home.

"I'm sorry, sir. I've already said you are."

"Jackson, Jackson, where are your wits?" cried Winnie tossing her earrings so that they flashed and gave off sparks.

Hitchcock received a sharp, pained impression of that sparkle of Winnie's earrings and the sudden dark shame that stained Jackson's jowls. Jackson, somber and profound, stood mutely bent to the scourge of Winnie's mirth. Jackson yielded to a tide of intolerable shame which painted his cheeks purple, while Winnie flung up her chin and laughed and shook a shower of dancing sparks off her ears. Her laughter, too, queerly sent a rocket up the dark of Hitchcock's mind.

It was as if he had already unlocked the drawer in the library table and had taken out what lay there, had pointed it, pulled the trigger—

This time, when the idea of death came to Hitchcock, it did not steal muffled and veiled upon him. It burst with deafening sound and blinding flame.

Jackson waited mutely bent in the

doorway. Jackson waited to be told what to say next to John Godowski.

Hitchcock looked from one to the

other of his family.

But David, dealing the cards, began to review the game Hitchcock had just lost. Dad's mistake was in going back to hearts. David's strong, white fingers shot the cards expertly into place while he told exactly why Hitchcock had forfeited a game. And Winnie bent eagerly to the score pad, her earrings swinging. As Winnie totted up hers and David's latest stupendous score her lips looked, somehow, relentless. Hitchcock's gaze beat vainly at the complacent absorption of his wife and son, and came to rest on the face of the girl who was to marry David.

As young as she was, there dwelt in her eyes, under her coronal of microscopic rosebuds, a kind of wistfulness that might mean sympathy. Her gaze answered his. She leaned across to him.

"You could say you're engaged."

Obviously! Hitchcock, repeating engaged to Jackson, felt a fantastic lift of spirit, a gratitude to the girl out of all proportion to the service of the profered word. He almost laughed. In his relief at postponing the inevitable, Hitchcock smiled at the girl who had fashioned his reprieve. He smiled at her gratefully though he spoke, as people do, of the most recent triviality.

"We don't mind a game more or less, do we, partner?" cried Hitchcock, rubbing his hands. "You don't treasure that game against me, do you?"

"No-o. But I really did wonder why you went back to hearts, if you had both the ace and queen in my suit."

Hitchcock pushed his chair back.

"I think Î shan't play any more," said Hitchcock with sudden petulence. "My eyes are tired."

Winnie smoothed the rudeness of his

exit. She said to the girl:
"My dear, don't reproach yourself.

"My dear, don't reproach yourself. It's too absurd of him to be sensitive

about his game. He ought never to have gone to hearts again. Of course! You were right to speak of it."

Hitchcock didn't look around as he went out, but he heard Winnie speaking

so and David saying:

"Oh, dad's had the jumps all day. Don't mind him. Walk in the garden, Lois?"

She was theirs. She was the embodiment of their easy superiority, for, if they had not called into being her clear cheek, her cloudy hair, it was they, not Hitchcock, who had culled these charms, even as the tulips, to crown this perfect house.

The library of Hitchcock's home was a long and lofty room hung with fabrics which innumerable guests had commended for color and texture. "Perfect color and texture, Winnie. You have the most unerring taste." Perfect mahogany planes, reflecting objects of undoubted art and lovely flower faces.

Hitchcock went into his library, and its perfection achieved by Winnie, as it were, in spite of him, stifled him like a hand on his throat. He went straight to the table.

You had the ace and queen both!

As he drew out his keys and stooped, he heard a girl's soft voice, saw blue eyes reproaching him. Ridiculous! A man doesn't shoot himself because the girl who is to marry his son reproaches him for a bad bid at bridge. Certainly not. Ridiculous! Hitchcock left his keys swinging at the lock of the table drawer and dropped into a chair.

It was, perhaps, ten o'clock then, and it was nearly midnight before he heard the steps and voices outside. What's that? He sat forward, sharply intent. The long windows of the library stood open to the terrace and the purple night. Hitchcock heard steps on the graveled path and voices.

"Oh, it is no trouble. The servants have gone to bed. I'm glad to take you to him."

"I wouldn't presume, miss, but it's very urgent. I've been trying to get in touch with him all afternoon."

Hitchcock turned the key and caught open the drawer of the table.

In that instant his life did, indeed, float clear as a bubble before Hitchcock's eyes. He saw his life as a bubble that reflects in its iridescence green of trees and red of roof and blue of sky, a whole shining world hanging at a child's lip.

Mirrored in that quivering globe was Hitchcock sitting down for luncheon yesterday in a room with high and inlaid beams and tall, sunny windows between copper-colored, brocade hangings; Hitchcock sitting down at a white-covered table by the sunniest window and feeling the warmth of that sun on his head and shoulders; Hitchcock sitting down in peace, his very lips shaping to the smile that should greet John who loved him.

Fragile and fair hangs the love of men between them. After twenty years a false breath will shatter it. And it is this which is intolerable.

Hitchcock sitting down to lunch on Tuesday curving his lips for an affectionate smile that would never be finished is a figure to weep over. His very content in the sun on his head and on the gleaming, coppery curtains and on the white, white cloth is to be wept at.

Or, Hitchcock, exiled from the only place where he was looked up to, dodging into a sort of rabbit's burrow. That is a figure to weep over, too. Hitchcock standing lonely in a common restaurant made up like an English coffee house, standing blinking and confused, not knowing what to do with his hat and stick. Poor Hitchcock, patronized as usual, this time by a young woman in a costume like a nursemaid out of Mother Goose.

The girl hadn't said a word, but the way she had wrested his hat and stick from him, and clamped them on a rack in arm's reach of him, must have made

every one in the place smile inwardly at the absurdity of Hitchcock. She had put him in the wrong as easily as Winnie herself could do. How easily superior women are.

Hitchcock's moment of understanding swelled to encompass a tree in blossom spreading ruffled chiffons like a girl. Every beautiful thing he ever saw made Hitchcock think of the daughter he had never had and still longed for. Surely that is a figure to weep over: Hitchcock yearning toward an insensible tree.

Though Hitchcock saw only hours instead of years, as the drowning are said to see, he saw them with complete understanding; he saw them in the round like a very world shining with infinite detail: the clotted color that humiliation painted on a butler's jowls under whip of Winnie's mirth; the orange splash of tulips on mahogany; the black of David's dinner coat: French rosebuds, pink and tea-rose yellow, in a fillet on a girl's brow. He saw Hitchcock at golf, patronized by a snub-nosed caddy. He saw him at dinner. He saw him at bridge. "If you had the ace and queen both, why did you-" He saw him in a room too perfect to bear, in a room with windows open to the purple night, about to shatter the bubble which held his loveless world in little, about to dash the empty bubble of life off his lips.

"I'm amost sure he's in the library. Anyway, we'll look there first."

The girl's voice mounted with her slippered feet from the graveled path to smooth tiles. Her voice was airy and floating. Far away at the bottom of the garden David began to sing. David had a rich, deep voice. He sang two lines of a French love ditty. The rhythm of it splashed and spattered in the quiet dark.

"Oh, Davy, the moon's coming up!"
Her feet paused, and her voice rose
like a lark's.

"The deuce it is! Where?"

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"Yonder. Over the arbor. Big as a wheel. Wait for me, Davy. I shan't be long."

Steps as light as dancing on smooth tiles and the patient tread of a toiler.

"What is it, Lois, child?" That was Winnie, cool and languid. Winnie lay still in some deep wicker chair on the terrace. At least, there was no sound of Winnie's stirring when the girl and the waiter, John, passed in the dark. "What is it, Lois?"

"Friend of dad's."

Cool, too. Cool as Winnie. Cool as spring water. Careless. Friend of dad's. Words dropped in passing. But the echo hung, quivering, beautiful, impossible to shatter with a sudden violent concussion.

She laughed at him. The girl who was going to marry David laughed softly at Hitchcock because he clutched at the table edge and blinked and was confused when the man in the brown coat said Crucible Tin was still climbing at closing time to-day.

"But I did exactly as you said, sir. I sold as you said, Mr. Hitchcock. I knew you knew best. And, anyway, I guess a man ought to be satisfied to double his money." John laughed in an unobtrusive, deprecatory manner. His soft, husky laugh mixed with the girl's soft, treble one. She stood in the open French window, shining against the dark.

"Were you dozing, dear? Did we wake you out of a splendid dream?"



THESE SWEET, SWIFT HOURS

THESE sweet, swift hours, though they are so few,
Are green oases in my desert heart;
They hearten me for all the other hours
That know not you, that keep us far apart.

In the dim aisles of my dull life's routine
They gleam like golden tapers in the dark;
They are to me as to the silent dawn
The sudden singing of the soaring lark.

They are rare jewels that are tossed to me, Not as a gift, but carelessly by fate. Yet, ah, I hoard and guard them jealously. For all that I have not, they compensate.

But they are few, dear God, they are so few, These sweet, swift hours that I have with you! ROSELLE MERCIER MONTGOMERY.



The Passing of Sarah

By Theda Kenyon
Author of "Not Told to the Jury."

F course," she complained, "you're doing this simply because I'm myself."

The man's hand, where it had fallen lightly on her forearm, did not relax. Beyond his shell-rimmed glasses, his eyes lit for a moment with ironic humor, then dulled again. It was all so sordid—so hopelessly, bitterly sordid!

"Naturally!" he admitted. "I'm not stupid enough to arrest you for some-

body else's crime."

She looked at him silently, tensely, for several seconds. Then, abruptly, the shell that had cased her all the years cracked. Tears welled into her brown eyes, overflowed, ran down her thin cheeks. Her nose flamed. She sniffled.

The man shuddered. A homely woman has no business weeping. She saw his aversion, and it unleashed her words.

"That is precisely what I meanyour disgust!"

He averted his eyes guiltily.

"If I were beautiful, you would have let me off with a warning."

"Nonsense!" he parried. "I've arrested thousands of pretty women."

"Never gladly."

"I'm never glad to arrest any one," he stated stiffly. It sounded, even to his ears, hypocritical.

"At least," she persisted, "you aren't sorry to arrest me, and you can't deny

that, if I had a face, you'd hate it. I've even heard your kind apologize: 'Sorry, dearie, but, if you won't go straight, why——'"

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Her mimicry brought the blood into his face. His business as a criminologist was analyzing criminals, not having them analyze him.

He spoke roughly:

"What rot! You've lifted enough stuff to-day to dress you from head to foot."

"Yes!" she shot back. "But can you

imagine me dressed in it?"

Her thin, little hand flung out, indicating the shimmering mass on the table where he had laid it after rescuing it. Flesh-colored underthings, transparent stockings, glittering slipper buckles, a chiffon gown.

"They look as if they'd fit you," he

suggested uncomfortably.

"They would." She nodded in swift emphasis. "Their size, I mean. I—can't help taking things my size. They're sometimes harder to unload." She shrugged, and her manner shifted to combativeness. "But I'm no fool. I'll never wear them."

"I'd almost rather you did," he said

unexpectedly.

She smiled—a wry little smile, catching the corner of her mouth into near attractiveness.

"No, you wouldn't-not if you once

saw me in them. Look at them!" she commanded, and, somewhat to his own surprise, he obeyed. For their significance, women's clothes take up amazingly little space. There lay a complete outfit, as far as his masculine eyes could tell, and yet, scarcely ten minutes back, they had been an inconspicuous trifle beneath the woman's dun-colored cape.

"Now, what do you see?"

"See ?"

"Don't you see a pretty woman, dressed for some fool frivolity, with men all around her? Of course, you do," she jerked. "So do I. That's why I have brains enough not to—try them on."

"Nobody ever doubted your brains, Sarah," he said, and wondered why he was glad to offer the compliment.

She laughed bitterly.

"That's the whole thing—in that sentence. Any other woman would have been Sally, or even Sal, years ago. I can do anything—anything—and still I look like a Sunday school teacher, and even you people maintain the dignity of calling me Sarah!"

He sat down suddenly. Somewhere, on the five floors below, seethed all the tragi-comedy of a great department store. Up here, alone with this gray little woman, in the ticking silence of the management's reception room, was life.

Morlay was too great a criminologist to consider his subjects "specimens." He had passed from that into the amazing individuality of each of them. This Sarah was too well known as a criminal to need introduction. She was too plain to have caused undue speculation concerning her as an individual, and yet, oddly, there was a connection between that very plainness and her crimes.

He began to con them over. A string of pearls, from the very jewel box of Mrs. Allerton-Wentworth. That was when Sarah had posed as a respectable

-and surprisingly efficient-personal Allerton-Wentworth. maid to Mrs. When they caught Sarah she got five years, but Mrs. Allerton-Wentworth never got the pearls. There was a special-built sedan, taken from the stage entrance of the Follies, where it had been left for a moon-struck hour by its fat and middle-aged owner. That time, the sedan was recovered, parked in front of St. Thomas', after what had, apparently, been the giddiest night of its intensive career, and Sarah had escaped. Just what she had done with the sedan while it had been in her possession no one ever knew. No one cared very much. They knew that, despite appearances, it had been something perfectly respectable, Sarah's face being what it was.

There had been others—many others, but that stuck in Morlay's mind.

"Sarah," he said abruptly, "suppose we are frank with each other."

Her brown eyes met his. They were nice eyes, if the lashes had not been so nearly invisible. Then, her mouth caught in the same odd little grin. Something in her manner suggested a naughty small boy, about to say, "Aw, gwan!"

"You interest me," said Morlay un-

expectedly.

"I'm—a queer specimen," admitted Sarah, with what, in another woman, would have been demureness.

"No, no," he muttered impatiently.
"I mean, as a woman." Her swiftly narrowed eyes and contemptuous lip checked him. "There has been in your life some experience——"

"No," corrected Sarah; "a lack of it."
"I see," said Morlay very gently.

"You don't," contradicted Sarah.
"No man does. He can't possibly.
That's why he claims to—in just that
voice. An ugly man can work his way
with his brains, with his will, with his
sheer passion. Brains in a woman scare
every one off; to have a will is 'un-

womanly, and to admit you're passionate—that's simply indecent."

Her small hands beat the overstuffed arms of her chair impotently. Morlay watched her covertly, waiting. The silence lengthened.

"What would you give to be beautiful?"

At his sudden voice, her chin shot up, and for an unguarded moment such light as Morlay had never dreamed of flooded her gray face. Then she laughed shortly.

"Is this a game? Why don't you take me in, and get it over with?"

Morlay made a little gesture.

"Sit down—there. Yes, it is a game, rather. You and I have been pitted against each other before, and you can easily see who wins. But now, why not try a round together?"

Another woman might have misconstrued his meaning; Sarah was prevented from this banality by her face and her inherent, contradictory honesty.

"Turning criminal?" she grinned.
"Not at all. You're turning straight."
Her speechless lips parted at his audacity. He lit a cigarette deliberately.

"You know who I am?"

"Morlay, the manhunter." Her tone was indifferent.

"Half right, half wrong. My interest is less in jailing people than in discovering why they're criminals."

"The result's the same."

"Not always. For instance, why not an exception this time? You say I would have let you off with a warning, if you'd been beautiful; I go deeper, and wonder if there would have been even the cause for a warning, if you'd been beautiful." She gasped. "What did you do with old Strickland's sedan?" he demanded. Her eyes strayed to the window. From where she sat, nothing was visible except a patch of bright spring sky, where mad little clouds skidded whitely. Her eyes dilated, but her voice was sullen.

"Rode around."

"Alone?"

She shrugged.

"Look at me."
"Precisely. Now, why did you want to ride around—alone—in a car you ap-

parently stole for the purpose?"

There was a long silence; Sarah moved restlessly, and at last spoke impatiently:

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"Oh, I don't know. I was restless. Spring fever—something in the night." Her hands tossed out a protesting little gesture.

"In other words, if you'd had the chance to ride around—not alone—you would not have stolen the car—a car obviously created for the comfort and pleasure of women whose profession is commercializing their faces. Now, the pearls—"

Sarah flung about.

"What is this-a third degree?" she asked.

"Perhaps, but you don't see any signs of cruelty yet, do you?"

Her eyes strayed over him, where he lolled at ease, his cigarette ashes dripping on the management's excellent Chinese rug. She had a sudden impulse to rebuke him for his carelessness, checked it, and turned to the window.

"No," she grudged at last.

"And—if it reassures you—the matter of the pearls is settled."

"You're right it is," agreed Sarah, and grinned.

"But—there's nothing to make you answer—I can't help wondering."

"Have you ever seen Mrs. Allerton-Wentworth?"

He nodded.

"Fine-looking woman."

"She thinks she's Venus," flamed Sarah. "And every time she sat in front of her glass, she'd fix herself so she'd get a reflection of me standing in back of her, at the same time, and then she'd keep her eyes fluttering from one to the other of us."

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"I see," said Morlay.

"Maybe," said Sarah. "Anyhow, the pearls were little enough for her to pay for the amount of satisfaction she got."

"Undoubtedly she's paid more for less," admitted Morlay absently. His whirling mind was shaping a perfect orb of decision. Obviously, Sarah was a case for a psychoanalyst-perhaps even, an alienist. But would a couturière do as well? Or, perhaps, a beauty specialist?

"Sarah," he said so suddenly that she jumped, "would you be willing to undergo a slight operation, a few weeks' confinement, to be beautiful?"

Sarah eved him suspiciously. "Think my mind's queer?"

"Perhaps; but it's the outside of your head, not the inside, I'm interested in. And I think it'll interest Hornby, too." "Hornby?"

"A surgeon-lives in London. You're at liberty, of course, to make any investigation of him you care to."

"London!" "Hot scoffed Sarah.

chance I'll interest him." "Listen," Morlay flung back, "I don't think you can go straight while you have

your face-"Any other man'd say I couldn't help

it," returned Sarah.

"Precisely. But give you a pretty face, and you'd take out your adventurings along the line open for women, and of no interest to the law. All women are parasites at heart; they have to get something for nothing."

"You're wrong!" snapped Sarah. "All women are pirates, not parasites! They may live on society, but they fight for everything they get, and, nine times out of ten, they pay the price in the end."

He stared at her. "Quite a philosophy," he said finally.

"You've done a bit of thinking, Sarah." "I've-had enough spare time to," ad-

mitted Sarah, somewhat grimly.

"Precisely. Well, I'm interested just

now in keeping you out of jail. It's too easy to put you in; besides, it doesn't do a darn bit of good. It simply gives you a chance to think up some new devilment; and some day-" snapped his fingers.

"With my face, the worst thing I'd do, short of murder, would look merely

sordid."

Morlay's lips twitched.

"My idea in getting your face changed isn't to give glamour to your lawbreakings; you've got to give me your word, before we go any further, that, if I overlook half a dozen unsatisfied charges against you, you'll chuck this business for good."

"And if I don't?"

"Jail," said Morlay. "But-I hope you will."

"You'll see to it I keep my bargain." "Naturally."

"And as long as I do, you'll waive the charges?"

"Yes."

"How do I know Hornby can do anything?"

"What he can't do, the Rue de la Paix can."

"And who's going to stand the gaff?" Morlay smiled.

"I shall-as long as you keep your word."

"That has a slant to it, too." Sarah grinned suddenly, and then sobered. "You must think you're a god."

"No," remarked Morlay; "merely Santa Claus."

"I never did believe in him."

"Here's your chance."

Their eyes locked, each weighing the Neither was inexperienced in other. humankind.

Finally, Sarah rose, and held out a deliberate, square, little hand.

"It's a go, fairy godfather."

He was a little surprised, but secretly

"Fine!" he said, and patted her shoulder paternally. An hour before, Sarah would have resented that. Now, she smiled secretly. If Hornby was any good, the day was not remote when even this complacent analytical male would hesitate before showing his lofty ap-

proval in just that way.

He opened the door, and stood aside for her to pass. Sarah was used to preceding men, especially men of Morlay's vocation; they always kept her where they could watch her. But now, as she moved forward, she visualized another scene-one where she claimed her right of precedence as a woman-a pretty woman. She held her head a little higher, and did not resent the frank stare of the elevator man as they swept down to the street floor.

During the months that followed Morlay became even more complacent concerning Sarah. The fact that the eminent manhunter had apparently let her slip through his fingers disturbed the authorities very temporarily; she was not sufficiently vicious to cause any great upheaval in a city already agog with greater crimes; and Morlay was glad enough to stand the good-natured scoffing of his peers in return for what

he knew to be the truth. Every new account he received of her, directly or indirectly, seemed to justify anew his somewhat dubious experiment. Hornby's cable, and the long letter that followed, told a tale of unflinching gameness, for the various cosmetic operations are far from painlessgameness well rewarded, for even the hardened Hornby was enthusiastic over what he called an "unprecedented revelation." His letter prompted Morlay to write Sarah requesting a photograph. She replied, in part:

"Not so long ago, you people simply took my picture, whether I would or no; those were the only photographs taken of me after I reached years of Now-thanks to you-I have the right of any other woman to refuse you or any other man my photo-

graph, unless I care to grant it; and that, my dear Mr. Morlay, is a luxury I intend to enjoy."

This piqued him, and then roused his suspicions. He began pulling the various wires that lay at his hand; but, though he discovered many intimate details of Sarah's life, none of them indicated that she was breaking her word.

Vicariously, he followed her to Paris; actually, his checks did. It was no small matter to finance Sarah, for she knew precisely what she wanted, and got it; but his interest in the experiment made it worth while. Her taste, he heard, was perfect; also, it appeared that she was enjoying no little vogue. If her past had been known, Morlay would not have wondered at this. Society requires the sauce piquante of the bizarre. But Sarah guarded her secret as carefully as her reputation, until one day-

It was a restless day in New York. Fitful bursts of warm sun cooed: "Spring!" And succeeding leaden skies shrieked: "Autumn!" One moment, in the eddying wind, the dust of the city whirled and danced, and blew in eyes, and clutched at hats. The next, a somnolent breeze caressed faces languorously.

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Morlay was sick of the city. Financially, there was no reason why he should remain in it. The fortune which, coming to him as a lad, had turned him into an erratic philanthropist, remained practically unscratched; but, by the same token, he had a notion that he had a mission. He was contemplating that, staring out at the smoke-grayed street, when a secretary brought him an unopened message.

He read it briefly. It said that Sarah was then in the Riviera, her time divided between flirtations and baccarat. At the end, his informant queried: "Is her credit unlimited?"

Apparently, then, though he had had

no unusual demands from her, she was not winning at the tables, however successful she might be at other pursuits. Almost with relief, Morlay leaped from Bread upon the waters! his desk. Sarah was more than an excuse to be rid of the city. It was obviously his duty to be in Monte Carlo for the last chapter. He suddenly saw that he had loosed a dangerous character, and virtuously he told himself that he must be there to take his share of the responsibility. It was so evident that he did not even pause to deny that the mere thought of the Riviera, after drear New York, made him a little delirious. He was there as swiftly as a great liner and a subsequent airplane could deliver

He had an appointment with his informant directly upon his arrival, but, though he gleaned a great deal of information concerning Sarah, he refused to have her pointed out to him. Incongruous that he should not recognize his own creation!

He went that evening to the casino, scanning every face with interest. There were many beauties, many adventuresses, but, though he had been told that Sarah was already there, he did not see her. Again he searched face after face, and then, as he was turning away baffled, an idea caught at him. His gaze swept to the hands about the table-long and slender, short and plump, jeweled and gemless, but never the short, decisive hands of Sarah. For a moment, panic seized him. Had his informant mistaken another woman for the one he was commissioned to watch? If so, where was Sarah? What was she doing by now?

He wheeled, with some vague intention of starting an alarm. A page handed him a note. As he took it, a mysterious fragrance reached him. He knew instantly it must be Sarah's, for he had paid twenty dollars an ounce for it.

He opened the note-stared at it incredulously.

My Dear Friend: You will return at once to your hotel, please? I am awaiting you there, and, ah, very eager to see you!

Sarah—write a letter like that? Even the up-and-down, pointed writing was unfamiliar. Could Sarah be trying to start a flirtation with him? He grinned at the audacity of the idea, even as he frantically struggled into an overcoat. He returned hastily to the hotel.

His eyes swept the lobby. It was half full, but no possible Sarah there. He paused an instant at the desk, thought better of his intention, and went directly to his rooms. Flinging open his door, the odor of a perfumed cigarette met him. He followed it to his balcony. Some one rose. A shimmer of moonlit, pallid satin, the plash of a jewel-weighted chiffon wrap, and then, a high, gay French little cry:

"Ah, my friend—my so dear friend—to see you again!"

And Morlay, embarrassed as a schoolboy, realized that he was being kissed on both cheeks—oh, very decently—one of those warm-hearted, friendly French kisses; that he was being held at arm's length, and stared at. It made him gasp. Suddenly, his suspicions asserted themselves; he caught the creature by the shoulders and swung her about until the full moon played over her sleek skin, gemming the long, halflowered lashes, as she regarded him beneath her lids. Her hair was red gold —pile on pile of it—none of your bobbed heads here! And that perfume!

"Sarah!" he muttered.

"Yes, my friend!" She breathed it, exquisite in its mystery. "I am beautiful—do you not find me so?"

"You're beautiful, all right," he admitted. "But-you're not Sarah!"

She laughed, a throaty little laugh.
"I wonder which of us is Sarah—
that other, or this?"

He caught her hand, held it under the moonlight to confirm his suspicion; it was undeniably the hand of Sarah. He could see it pounding the upholstery of the department-store chair, and the picture made him shiver. Then, all at once, he noticed the great emerald that made it seem even smaller.

"Sarah," he said severely, and his heart leaped, "where did you get that?"

Sarah sighed.

"It once belonged to Mrs. Allerton-Wentworth," said she, and dropped her French accent. Her eyes rose suddenly to his, pleading. "You—do not mind?"

"Mind!" he echoed. "Mind! But

how---'

"Quite easy. Indeed, it seems odd, but the most natural thing in the world that——"

"Natural for you, perhaps," Morlay said bitterly.

"Only very recently," murmured Sarah.

"What were you doing playing baccarat?" shot Morlay.

"Losing, for the most part," admitted Sarah.

"No wonder you were glad to see me!"

"If I had intended sending the bills to you, I should hardly have been glad to see you," returned Sarah coldly. "My debts are paid—entirely."

"I see," said Morlay. "Had to cut loose somehow, I suppose. Well, who

is he?"

"His name"—and she lingered on it—
"his name is John Allerton-Wentworth."

"Good heavens!"

"Junior."

"He staked you?"

"Hardly. He is a clergyman."

"Clergyman! Sarah, are you shameless? What's he doing here?"

"Reforming me. It's surprising how men adore reforming—me."

"But who-did stake you?"

Sarah hesitated.

"The Allerton-Wentworth pearls. Your little Sarah is very provident. I had saved every cent—for an emergency."

"But the emergency?"

"John Allerton-Wentworth. Odd, isn't it? I had to do something desperate to catch his eye, as it were. Baccarat—even here—is spectacular, if one plays enough!"

A knock sounded. Sarah called:

"Enter, mon chéri!"

Her cloak of French mannerisms, her accent, swept back to her; but there was something new—an atmosphere of tenderness, almost of adoration, haloing her as a man strode across the room. She held out her hand to him, and the great emerald flashed joyously.

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"Mr. Morlay, this is my fiancé—how you say—betrothed. Chéri, Mr. Morlay is my banker. I want you to be

friends-always."

The men shook hands. Sarah, with a glance at her tiny watch, laughed.

"You are not one second late, my dear. I told him he was to come for me ten minutes after you came in, which would give us time for our so little chat of business." Sarah—respectable to the last!

Allerton-Wentworth took Sarah's

arm possessively.

"My lady mother's waiting for us, dear. You'll forgive me for taking her away, Mr. Morlay?"

"I suppose I'll have to," said Morlay, and there was something almost rueful

in his voice.

As they went, he admitted his disappointment. He did not know just what he had expected to result from his experiment. Subconsciously, he wondered if he had expected some heroic exploit of crime; otherwise, when it had so obviously been a success, when he had so evidently given a useful member to society, why should he regret the passing of Sarah?

The Wild Streak

By Elizabeth Newport Hepburn

Author of "The Thing That Matters,"
"The Pride of Galates," etc.



BEATRICE HENLEY seemed as excited and as pleased with herself as some naughty child. In her light evening frock, slim, clinging, revealing, she made an extraordinary picture against the shining cabinet of white enamel and glass in the doctor's inner office. The cabinet was full of slender instruments of every possible size and shape, sinister bits of polished steel, small, bright knives of many kinds.

The visitor gave a little sigh of sheer amused curiosity.

"How different it is from the same place in the daytime—when your patients are here, and that pretty nurse of yours. I wonder where I've seen her before, by the way? To-night, doctor, your office is as exciting as an empty stage—when one is waiting—"

Doctor John Warren, ten minutes ago Mrs. Henley's partner in the ballroom at Sherry's, looked at her now, so alien, almost fantastic in this familiar environment. Some careless phrase of his had suggested this midnight visit—challenge on his part, daring on hers—so that she had dismissed her car and walked the three blocks with the young doctor as the result of a merry mood and a swift impulse. Now they were examining each other curiously, quite as though they had just met. She said at last seriously, studying the little bright knives:

"It must be marvelous—the sense of power, the feeling of responsibility, and knowing always the danger——"

He laughed at her awed voice, and liked the eagerness of her shining eyes. She had never before seemed to him so young, so virginal. It was preposterous to think of her as married!

"Sometimes a man is really scared stiff, but obliged to see it through. But, at least, our work is seldom dull."

"I should think not, with life and death in your hands. A mastoid operation, say—getting so close to the brain, knowing what a slip must mean. Or operating on an enemy. Did you ever do that, Doctor Warren?"

"Well, 'enemy' is a big word. But I had a rather amusing case a year or two ago."

"Tell me about it," she said, sitting down upon the arm of a huge, officiallooking chair, which could seem so sinister when one was in it.

"At the Eye and Ear Hospital I was called in to examine a fellow physician, and found him in a bad way. And he was a cad who had lied about me—a deliberate, malicious lie—when we were internes together. When he recognized me he looked petrified. I could see he had been suffering for days; that he was already exhausted by pain and plain funk."

"What happened?"

"When we were alone for a moment I asked him if he wouldn't rather have some other surgeon to operate, some one who didn't know him! I did it nastily, like that. But he looked so sick that I weakened and added: 'See here, Jake, I haven't forgotten the lie you told about

me, and probably never will. But it didn't help you any, and, if you want me for this job, I'll do it right.' He stared at me blankly for a minute; then he said glumly:

"'Marivale believes you're the best we've got—for mastoid. And I can't afford to be fussy. So go ahead.'"

"He didn't apologize, or anything, even then?"

"Nary an apology. I liked him for that. After all, what would it have meant at 'hat moment?"

"Nothing but what you call funk, I

suppose. But what happened?"
"Oh, I turned the trick. He came
out of the ether as good as new. I
never did a prettier job. I suppose that
rotten lie of his rather put me on my
mettle. It would, you know."

"Yes, I suppose it would."

She went into the waiting room and rat down in a comfortable, unprofessional chair. John Warren followed her. She was looking about the room appreciatively.

"You know, doctor, this is rather an unusual office—and charming. I like the cream and cherry of your curtains and chintzes; that good old desk; these etchings."

Warren tried to see his own office freshly, without prejudice or familiarity.

"Glad you like it. But it's my nurse, not I, who deserves the credit. I left the decorating to her. And she spent weeks hunting for some good etchings at a low price—and finally got these. The other day a stodgy old art dealer came here for treatment. He fastened on the etchings at once; offered me twice as much as she paid two years ago."

Beatrice examined one of the pictures closely: a group of jagged towers against a stormy sky, with a signature already beginning to command the respect of the initiate.

"It's a beauty! She surely has an eye for line and tone."

She spoke respectfully, wondering again why the girl's face was so familiar.

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But Warren was not thinking of art or of his office nurse. He came toward her swiftly, smiling. Lean and tall, with a strong head and muscular shoulders, he was not the sort of young man whom pretty women ignore.

"Beatrice!"

But she eluded him easily.

"No, no! I came just to see you—
to talk——"

Warren looked at her skeptically, a faint smile still lingering on his rather large mouth, at once sensuous and sensitive. In her evening gown, with a velvet opera cloak falling from her shoulders, she might have stepped from a portrait painted by Romney, except that about her there was some queerly modern accent, some delicate, yet unmistakable sign that she belonged to her own period. Warren wondered what that something was. But he said:

"Then talk, madame. Explain your-

self!"

Her lip curled at his obvious mixture of doubt and curiosity.

"Why I came here with you to-night—that's what puzzles you?"

"Frankly-yes!"

Her voice was crisp and cool as she sat very still, looking not at the young doctor but at some mental image far beyond the four walls about them.

"To-night—at that dance just before you came—a man asked me to leave my husband and go abroad with him. He said we'd marry as soon as Jim got his divorce. And he's rather a fascinating person, rich, of course, idle, spoiled, yet clever in his way."

Warren remembered a certain blond plutocrat with broad shoulders and a narrow forehead. When he had entered the ballroom he had seen Beatrice Henley dancing with him, and the young doctor had recognized the millionaire and sharply criticized the absent husband. He had no business to neglect

this lovely girl, leaving her to the attentions of a yellow hound like that. Then Doctor Warren wondered whether people might not call him, Jack Warren, a yellow hound, could they see him now. He began to listen to that deep, blurred voice of hers, a voice always slightly hoarse but with a sort of rough sweetness.

"Oh, it's a long story-why I should have listened to him, even for a moment. I ought to be a happy woman, Doctor Warren. But I'm not happy; I'm merely luxurious and idle. All the furious energy in me has only one outlet: going out; buying clothes; vamping men! And yet it's not my husband's fault; it's rather his ignorance. You see, Mr. Henley is successful-a manufacturer with an office here in New York and a great plant up the State where he spends fully half his time-but he is hideously busy. first two years of our marriage it was different; we did things together; rode horseback; even read aloud; talked. But lately he's occupied every possible moment; they seem to need him more at the factory. I'm married, yet sometimes I feel like a widow-or a divorcee, at least. Only God knows how lonely a woman can be-a woman whom other women envy!"

She stopped, then began again earnestly:

"I came here with you, Doctor Warren, to escape giving any answer to that other man. And I thought, perhaps, you might give me something I've wanted for years."

"And that is?"

"Friendship, with a decent, understanding, hard-working man! I've had love-making, all kinds, from men who trail after me whenever Jim's back is turned. And I've got a husband, loyal in his way, generous, giving me a big house and two cars and a box at the opera and a string of idle people to play with—people my possessions have

bought for me—and all the time nothing real—"

John Warren made a swift movement toward her, then sank back into his chair.

"What is real?"

She did not stir, or look at him, but that mesmerizing voice of hers went on:

"Oh, work; honest, concentrated work. And children. And sometimes —love——"

"Love?" He said it as though he were beginning to understand, but she tossed the word back to him changed, ennobled.

"Yes, love. Not passion. Not sentimentality. But the thing a woman may lean upon, trust herself to. And it's rare—as rare as happiness, or flawless beauty, or black pearls. When it's new, not quite full grown, I think it may be something between friendship and chivalry."

To Warren what she was saying seemed startling, almost satiric. She had come here alone with him, in the night—to talk about friendship, and chivalry! He might be capable of neither, but, at least, he was human, and no waster. He went to her and put his arms about her.

But making love to a wholly unresponsive woman, however beautiful, may get on a man's nerves. She said, at last, quietly:

"It's my fault, of course-"

He paused in his tigerish prowling up and down, but did not speak, and she shrugged.

"Oh, I know. But you seemed bigger than the others, with more imagination, more generosity. I thought you might see—"

He had an illogical feeling of having failed her as she went on:

"You see, I can get that anywhere —what you're so ready to give. My set—the whole town—is honeycombed with irresponsible love-making, to use the politest words. The thing I'd hoped

for is quite different. But perhaps you couldn't feel it-for me."

He spoke roughly:

"How do you know what I can or cannot feel? You talk about imagina-Good heavens! Where's your own? If you had any, you'd know what doctors are up against every day, dealing perpetually with women! It's not what a man says, or does. I swear it isn't! Rather it's what women are forever suggesting by their manner, their hunger for admiration, their appalling willingness to treat any poor dub of a doctor differently from the way they treat other men, as though he were immune to ordinary temptations! They like to stir us up, prod us, and then go on pretending that we have the wisdom of Solomon and the inhibitions of Saint Paul!"

He stopped for breath, and then, seeing her startled face, laughed suddenly, a little ashamed of his own vehemence.

"What is it you really want, Beatrice

Henley?"

"Exactly what we're having now—real talk, sincere, honest! In my set most of the men I meet haven't any ideas or convictions or enthusiasms, outside of business and sport. What you've just said opens up a whole new world. I had never thought what doctors must be up against."

"Women don't," said Warren shortly. He added: "And what else are you

after, beside talk?"

"Just what I've said—the companionship of an able, hard-working man, not too busy to give me a little time and

thought."

Like most normal bachelors, Warren had jeered at what he called platonic slush. Yet this girl, sitting here in his office at two o'clock in the morning, seemed really to expect that he would take her seriously. He took her hand, instead, and laid it swiftly against his cheek:

"You mean you don't want-this?"

Her unwilling blush made her look like a schoolgirl.

"At least, I don't want to want it! Yet I'm lonely, doctor, and lonely people are vulnerable. But, if I let things go, played the usual game, I'd hate myself the next day."

He understood that, having experienced a few similar reactions in his own

life.

"But what about the other man? The rich brute who wants you to sacrifice your position for his pleasure?"

"He doesn't sound attractive, as you describe him," she said, smiling. "But, at least, he isn't furtive, like so many of them. And, of course, I've answered him by running away—coming here with you."

Jack Warren looked at her discarded

cloak, then at his clock.

"Anyway, you've never cared for him—with your heart or your head. He's just appealed for a moment to the wild streak in you."

"The wild streak! Oh, you do understand!" she cried. "Respectability

can be so tame."

He was putting her cloak about her shoulders.

"But remember it's only a wild streak, not a rotten spot. They're different, though old-fashioned people don't always see it. And now we'll find a taxi."

She laughed, a little triumphant laugh, as he went to find his hat and cane.

"Doctor Warren, I'm proud of my judgment—or maybe it's only the early Victorian stuff they used to call intuition."

"About what?"

"You! I knew a woman could trust you! And we'll do this again, won't we?"

He stared at her ruefully.

"I suppose you'll do what you like, danger or no danger."

They went out into the crisp, starry night, and presently found a cruising taxicab as yellow as a Cinderella's pumpkin.

And that was the beginning of the queerest affair Jack Warren ever had with a woman.

They met frequently, sometimes at dances to which the doctor was invited by some mutual acquaintance, and again through Beatrice Henley's clever maneuvering. Now and then he took tea with her in her own drawing-room, or they met at a restaurant for a gay little dinner á deux. At this time it seemed to Jack that Mr. Henley was away from his wife more than half of the time. To critical eyes it might have appeared a somewhat dangerous flirtation, but Beatrice Henley seemed curiously free from any sort of espionage in one of the largest and most impersonal cities on earth. Actually, their relation possessed the rainbow colors of youth and adventure, and yet remained a friendship, unconventional but wholly respectable. And the young doctor found it stimulating. He did better work because of those gay hours with Mrs. Henley; found himself more interested in his patients because of her lively curiosities. months they met, danced together, took queer, rushing walks through the Park or up Riverside, and discussed every topic under heaven, and all with an astonishing evasion of those emotional interludes supposed to be inevitable.

One night Jack Warren joined Mrs. Henley at the theater where she was sitting alone in a box watching an elaborate performance, conscious of being supremely bored. Together they deserted the box while the house was still dark, during the last act. Beatrice telephoned to her chauffeur that he need not meet her as arranged, and they turned into the Park together. The air was fragrant, delicious; a blend of December's crispness and the promise of

April.

"How heavenly this is, after that close place," she said with a little sigh of relief.

They wandered about, climbing hills for the sake of running down them, hand in hand; watching the fantastic tricks played by the moonlight upon trees and lakes and wide meadows; talking casually, disjointedly of everything and nothing. Beatrice said at last:

"By the way, at the opera the other night I saw your Miss Linden. In evening dress she's lovely—really distinguished, just as I thought she would be. And she was with that big, redheaded Stanley Burchell from Chicago. My husband knows him; he's something in boxes or bags—a manufacturer; doing well, too. And he has an ugly, clever face. I like him."

"I've heard her talk about him, but haven't met him," said Jack carelessly.

"Then you don't know whether they're engaged or not?" she asked. "He wants to be, if he isn't. That's obvious to any one who sees them together."

"Engaged? Good heavens, no!" said Warren, startled, indignant. "Why should they be?"

"Why shouldn't they? If he's able, well-bred, a really good sort? And I remember at school——"

But the specialist who employed Miss Linden interrupted quite rudely:

"Because it would be a catastrophe if they were, for me! She's the best nurse I've ever had—or ever seen, for that matter. And she fits into my routine, my habits, and prejudices. Losing her would be horrible—like going blind, or losing one of my hands."

Beatrice Henley paused to look at her companion. Her brows lifted and her slim little nose crinkled in amusement, but she made no audible comment concerning the selfishness of ambitious young doctors. What was the use? But how alike they were—these determined men with brains; men out for

success; her husband and her friend, both so much more interested in their own individual lives than in any woman! She had a queer, fierce impulse for an instant, a wish that she could hurt them, make them suffer as women suffered.

They had come to a bridge and were looking into a sea of white moonlight. Suddenly Una Linden, and work, and success, all such unimportant trifles, dropped from their thoughts. beauty about them claimed every atom of attention and shut out, like some gauzy, gleaming curtain, the dull, everyday world. On one side was the lake, on the other the beautiful darkness of trees. They paused instinctively. that fairy twilight, between luminous moonlight and black velvet shadow, the girl's face looked extraordinarily young and lovely above her dark furs. Doctor John Warren forgot completely that -to him-somewhat mythical personage, Mr. James R. Henley.

"Beatrice, you're a page out of Hans Anderson! No, you belong in my little green volume of 'Le Morte D'Arthur!' You're a woman of magic, fairy-land—"

Her soft laugh answered this.

"It's just the moonlight. Diabolic, isn't it? Tricking foolish mortals. But you look rather nice yourself."

Abruptly, without warning, a flood of emotion caught him, sweeping him away from his safe harbor of self-sufficiency upon chartless seas. seemed alone in a black-and-silver He put his arms around universe. her, not with any deliberate intent, but instinctively, just as an animal, flung into water, begins to swim. In the clean beauty of the night they tasted the savor of youth, smelled its heady fragrance, forgot inhibiting responsibilities. For a long moment they were together on an unforgetable peak, far above the dull level of commonplace living. Then, at last, reluctantly, they walked on, toward the downtown exit of the Park. On the Avenue Jack said slowly:

"Beatrice, do you want me to apologize? Even if I can't say I'm sorry

"No. It was my fault, too. But I'm afraid we must call a halt-"

"On what?"

"All this: our meetings, our long talks, our hours together, alone."

"Dear, why can't they go on?"

She turned to look at him, unsmiling, grave eyed.

"Because—oh, various things would interfere. But principally because the glitter back there, in the moonlight, wouldn't last."

"You can't possibly know-"

"For Heaven's sake, stop!"

"Stop what?"

"Questioning, analyzing, brushing off the bloom, picking each petal to pieces——"

She paused on her own doorstep, looking down at him on the step below. Her lips curved and her eyes sparkled.

"But, oh, how lucky for you that I am, you self-centered, ambitious bachelor, with your world still to conquer!"

He caught her hand, but with the other she slipped the key into the lock. In an instant she had eluded him, with a little laughing gasp. She was inside; the door closed softly. He stood alone in the white moonlight flooding the silent street.

In his room half an hour later Doctor Henley remembered the problems he must meet on the morrow; the operation to be performed—an operation

which promised to be difficult. Una Linden had been home sick for several days with a feverish cold. Thank Heaven she was back.

During the next fortnight the town seemed entirely filled with diphtheria and flu, and he worked incredibly long hours. He did not see Beatrice once, though he talked to her over the telephone several times, and once she was at the office when he was away on an out-of-town case. When he came in late that afternoon, rather limp, Una Linden told him about this call.

"She had a mean throat and wanted a treatment. But I gave her some of that gargle you gave me, as she couldn't wait."

Fresh and crisp in her white linen, with her shining, coppery hair and wide, brown eyes, Una Linden looked at the doctor a little absently.

"I do like her so—always did. She's rich and spoiled; much too lovely to be popular with women. But she has real brains; she's interested in other people. And she hasn't developed claws, like so many women trained for social competition and for no other job. Also, she is sending you a lot of patients—the paying kind."

For Una that was quite a speech. Usually she let the doctor and his patients do the talking. So Warren was impressed. He hated missing Beatrice; the memory of that hour in the moonlight still tingled through him. But at the moment life was too hectic for romance. He ached in every bone and muscle from overwork, lack of sleep. Getting time enough for food and exercise was difficult as the epidemic spread and developed new problems.

Then one night, late, his telephone rang just as he was getting into bed.

"It's Beatrice Henley speaking, Doctor Warren. We have a house full of people, dancing, and my husband has just come home, dreadfully ill. Doc-

tor Carne is here, and he suggested you for a consultation. Can you come at once?"

Bag in hand, Jack ran up the Henley steps within twenty minutes. The whole house glittered with light, and the drawing-rooms were still full of people, but in the hall an old negro met the doctor and led the way upstairs. His face showed the peculiar pallor of the scared darky.

"Yes, suh, they's waitin' foh you upstairs. Mr. Henley shore is mighty sick"

On the next landing Beatrice met him, still in her shimmering ball gown.

"Oh, Jack, he's been suffering horribly. Doctor Carne was here already, as our guest, and when he said he'd like you sent for I felt relieved at once."

John Warren was conscious of a shock-of something like anger. He remembered having told her that story about the interne on whom he had The story was influencing operated. her now, he knew. He wished Carne had called in some one else. And then they were in a great airy bedroom full of rare tapestries and old furniturethe kind one associates with European palaces and crowned heads. On a vast, carved bed, under a silken canopy, lay a man, lean, hawk faced, with restless, shining, slate-gray eyes. The young doctor, confronted with a patient visibly suffering and in danger, forgot everything but the man's need and his own power to help.

After a brief examination Warren had a short consultation with Doctor Carne, a heavy, elderly man possessed of an astonishingly alert and youthful mind. Then Jack went back to the sick man.

"I take it, you're bent on operating?"
James Henley said calmly.

"Within the hour," replied Doctor Warren promptly. Turning to Mrs. Henley, he asked if he might use the telephone. He spoke to Una Linden, at the moment home, in bed, but instantly awake and reassuring. Yes, she could be there in half an hour, perhaps less, and presently she appeared, uniformed, fresh cheeked, and steady eyed.

Before taking the anæsthetic the patient looked up at Jack Warren. His face wore a shadowy, ironic smile.

"My wife tells me that you and she are friends, Doctor Warren. I want to ask you to look after her, however this business turns out. She has plenty of courage, but she's high keyed and doesn't spare herself."

Warren knew that his own face was burning under the scrutiny of those steady eyes.

"I'll look after her, Mr. Henley. But you'll soon be able to do it yourself. Within a few weeks I expect to get you both out of town for a long vacation. You need one."

Henley smiled again, the slightly crooked smile that made his thin face interesting.

"You're something of an optimist, doctor."

"No. Merely onto my job," said Jack Warren, caustic and confident.

Yet an hour and a half later, as he waited in another room for his patient to come out of the anæsthetic, Warren was taut with suspense. It was a little as if he and Henley had changed places; as though it were himself who had undergone the operation. True, his diagnosis had proved correct, and he had done good work.

But there had been a black moment when the patient's heart had unaccountably weakened, when the situation was touch and go. Even now Warren was far from confident of the outcome. As he waited he was irritatingly aware of his surroundings, of their luxury and beauty. He thought of Beatrice in another room, also waiting. Again he remembered that moment in the Park, when she had been in his arms. It

seemed to him ghastly, this domestic crisis upon which he had stumbled. He had done his utmost, yet suppose the man died!

Miss Linden came out of the sick room into the wide, dimly lit hall. He could see her trim, white linen, her hair glowing like strands of copper wire. Why was she so slow? He felt a horrible sensation at the pit of his stomach—the physical grip of fear. Then she was beside him, her mouth curled up at the corners, her bright eyes crinkling as they always crinkled when Una was pleased.

"He's fine, doctor. Pulse and respiration normal. And he has recognized Mrs. Henley. She's with him now." She made a little quick gesture. "But you are bright green! You need a stiff drink. Wait!"

She reappeared in an astonishingly short time. It was an extremely stiff drink, such as Warren would not have dreamed of giving to a patient. But he drank it to the last drop.

Ten days later Henley greeted Doctor Warren in the library, enthroned in a great leather chair. Beatrice had been reading aloud to her husband, and Jack recognized the frock she wore—blue velvet, with a silver bandeau in her dark hair. She had worn both that night of their last walk in the Park. Yet now he asked himself if he had not imagined that hour, the tête-á-tête in his office. Nothing seemed so improbable as his having known her in any such intimate fashion. Yet he had a sense of expectation, of waiting for some climax still to come.

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The conversation pivoted upon Palm Beach, the way to travel comfortably; and then very quietly Henley dropped his bomb.

"Now that I'm getting well, Beatrice, what do you want me to do?"

"Do?" she said slowly. "About what, Jim?"

Grayer, older, Henley's voice, at least, was strong again, in its mordant irony a suggestion of his acceptance of life as a kind of farcical comedy with tragic interludes.

"About—well, about our two lives, my dear. I've been infernally busy this last year, but not quite blind."

He stopped and his wife looked at him, her eyes wide open, startled. He began again:

"I couldn't whisper it before, even to you—especially to you—but for eighteen months my business has been on the ragged edge of failure. The factories were involved. I've had to pour in everything I own, including my own vitality. For a while it seemed that bankruptcy was inevitable. No, the danger is past now. But the situation accounts for what must have seemed to you gross neglect, and, perhaps, I've been mistaken in not telling you. Yet it seemed to me that I couldn't speak without hurting you more than my absences were liable to do."

She gave a little indignant cry, but he continued quietly, and the two younger people watched him with that fascinated recognition of power which

hypnotizes youth.

"Despite this stress of anxiety, I've not been wholly ignorant of matters at home. Warren, here, has saved my life, but before this little episode I think I may assume that he's developed a not wholly professional interest in my wife. My dear fellow, I don't blame you! But its her feeling that interests me most, naturally. You two have been spending a good deal of time together. The question is: what do you want of the future?"

The younger man heard himself saying in a rough, strange voice:

"Henley, it's all my doing. She's never given me the slightest—"

But the convalescent interrupted him rudely:

"That's all right, Warren. I know

my own wife. But feeling is sometimes beyond our control, however we may govern our actions. It's how you feel about it, Beatrice——"

She was leaning a little forward, her dark eyes on her husband's face.

"I've been behaving abominably, Jim. I'm glad you know it—that you've been interested enough to keep informed, in spite of the insatiable money god you've been gorging."

Henley started to speak, but she brushed him aside with a quick gesture:

"It's my turn now, Jim." Both men watched her, puzzled, fascinated, for there was a sort of electric excitement about her. Her words came in a quick, bright flood.

"Jim, you've been cruel, stupid, and not for one year, but for nearly two! You've given me every luxury, opportunities that I haven't known how to use, and withheld the one thing that mattered: my share of your time and attention! For months I've been in a rage, jealous of your factories and committees and companies, of your very employees! And other men have been so willing to give what you couldn't spare-two kinds of men: dancing puppets and prowling wolves! I got sick of them all, and it was then that Doctor Warren came, that we began to know each other. It commenced with my going to his office alone-around two o'clock in the morning!"

Henley said sharply:

"Yes, I heard about that, too."

She stared and then laughed softly.

"How on earth—— Well, you were a good sport, letting him operate! You couldn't really know—— But now I'm glad to have you recognize the very finest friendship I've ever had."

"Are you pretending that he hasn't

made love to you?"

"Of course, I have," interrupted Warren, but she swept on, ignoring both protest and interruption:

"He's human; we both are! Some-

times we've had to hang on for dear life or we would have smashed gloriously! You see, we found each other attractive. But he played fair, as I knew he would; he was decent. If he hadn't been, I might have caved in when I was so horribly lonesome. You see, I never told him one thing—the thing you should know without being told——"

She paused. A heavy silence settled over the room. Then:

"You do know, Jim? Yes, you've always known, only you were too absorbed saving your old factories to bother about saving some other things. Oh, what in time does money matter, compared——"

Husband and wife were staring at each other. Warren felt that they had forgotten him until Henley said suddenly:

"Beatrice, you haven't played fair."
He was staring now at the younger
man's strained face, but Mrs. Henley
sighed and then laughed:

"Oh, yes, I have. He— Well, I don't suppose he knows it himself, but he cares a great deal more for another woman that he's ever cared for me! Only he's devoured by ambition, too. She's too useful, as she is, to be turned into a superfluous social ornament, a mere wife! To him I've been a flash of adventure, a 'wild streak,' but never what she could be to him—what I once was—to you."

Henley's voice broke for the first time.

"What you are always—always!"

She was on her feet. Warren saw her lean over the tense figure in the chair like some bright, hovering bird.

The doctor muttered something inarticulate about an engagement, and escaped from the room, awkward, embarrassed, yet pulled by one obsessing idea as by a magnet.

At his office the waiting room was

still empty, but in the small, inner consulting room, on a low chair by the window, sat Una reading a battered green copy of Thackeray's "Vanity Fair." The light fell softly on her white uniform and shining hair. She had not heard his key in the door, but when his shadow fell upon her back she gave a startled cry:

"Oh. doctor-

All the way from the Henleys' house to the office he had been remembering that damning phrase: "She's too useful as she is to be turned into a superfluous social ornament, a mere wife!" But now as he stood before this quiet, capable girl he remembered something Beatrice had said weeks earlier, and what he actually said was:

"Una, are you going to marry that red-headed dub, Burchell?"

She dropped her book and stared back at him.

"You must have been to the Henleys'. They know him—know that he's a very able, successful man. I never heard him called a 'dub' before."

"You haven't answered my question."

The telephone rang sharply, and she sprang toward it, but he blocked her way.

"It can wait—for once. Tell me!"

Her mouth corners tilted in that
puckish way they had, but she said demurely:

"I promise you, doctor, not to desert the office without due warning—three months' notice, at least."

The telephone rang on, querulous, insistent, and then the front doorbell whirred sharply. Warren took a step forward:

"Damn the office!" he cried. But she was out of the room, down the hall, opening the door demurely for a large, waddling dowager:

"Yes, Mrs. Hornblower, the doctor has just come. You may go right in."

But when she had mollified the raging telephone, and closed the door of the consulting room upon complaining patient and glowering doctor, Una turned for an instant to the mirror in the tiny dressing room, the place where feminine patients powdered their noses.

The afternoon had darkened, so she flashed on the light, staring at the reflection of her own face, wide eyed, scarlet lipped. She cooled her burning cheeks with the tips of icy fingers, and for a moment her eyes blurred so that she could not see her face. Under her breath she said softly:

"It's Beatrice Henley. She's made

him see me, at last. Those old psychoanalyst sharks would call it 'the power of suggestion.' And I thought—I was afraid—— But all those years ago, at school, Beatrice always played fair. Oh, I do like that girl——"

She heard the doctor's voice; then the portly patient's indignant wheezing after a strenuous treatment. In a moment the outer door closed and footsteps hurried down the hall; she heard her name spoken. Very deliberately and carefully the office nurse powdered her nose



Mistinguett, the famous and perennially youthful and vivacious Parisian dancer, now starring in this country in the Shubert production of "Innocent Eyes," is said to possess more shoes than any woman in the world, wherewith to regale her lovely feet. The estimate varies from one hundred to four-hundred-odd pairs of shoes and slippers of many alluring varieties. A recent photograph of the dancer, taken in her hotel suite, showed her surrounded by "some" of her gorgeous footgear. The dainty little creature was herself almost obliterated. The slippers which have, however, taken New York by storm and which have created a new vogue in expensive, exotic footwear, are a pair completely rhinestone studded and dazzlingly bewitching. Already the more exclusive shoe shops are showing copies of them and they are to be seen on the twinkling feet of fair dancers at the night clubs and hotels.



A French specialist has recently started a campaign in behalf of uninhibited, vociferous, enthusiastic sneezing, maintaining that it is one of nature's best means of maintaining perfect health in the individual. The courageous physician seeks to popularize his theory, and establish it as universal practice, by suggesting interesting methods of achieving the unsuppressed sneeze and of enjoying it to the full. A brochure recently published and distributed by him enumerates seven or eight effective methods of sneezing. Social custom and legislation having long contended for the concealed and amply protected sneeze, the public is not taking to the doctor's fervent instruction.



The Strange Pose

By Ted Rennolds



IN all the world there appeared no living being. Under the cold gray of the squaw winter sky, the surf rolled in with increasing heaviness and flooded across the uneven shoreline of the bar. A light mist arose from the breakers, and, fanned by a sharp wind, swept inward, partially obscuring the distant mainland beyond.

There was something primitively vital in this panoramic expanse of wilderness and water; something behind it; a desolate force which was at once destructive and futile. Even the great heron and its mate, emerging from the mist, seemed to sense it as, inch by inch, they fought onward against the wind.

At length, at the far point of the bar, the solitary figure of a man appeared. Momentarily lost from sight as he skirted a sharp bend, he again reappeared, and, glancing toward the mainland, walked rapidly down the leaward Well-knit, symmetrical, the body of the man gave the impression of tremendous strength. The thick shoulders, drooping slightly as if too heavy, too burdensome to be carried erectly, served only to strengthen the impression. The face, likewise, was strong. The shaggy evebrows, meeting in a black smudge above a welldefined nose, seemed to intensify the depth of the dark eyes beneath. mouth was a severe line, hard, unsympathetic; the chin prominent and stubborn.

Reaching a diminutive cove farther down the beach, the man paused momentarily and emptied a handful of shotgun shells from the pocket of his hunting jacket, tossing them beside a gun on the sand. He moved on again, ascending a slight elevation, and disappeared behind its receding slope. Immediately he returned, carrying in his thick arms the limp figure of an unconscious man. Carefully he made his way over the rough ground and laid it within the partial shelter of the cove. Then, standing erect, he gazed silently down upon the white, delicate face beneath him. Lengthening downward from the closed eyes, and about the weak mouth, were faint lines of dissipation. In repose, the entire face bore the evident imprint of license. The peculiar curve of the lips added an indistinct irony to the countenance. Yet, beneath, there was a superior quality in the face.

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Keith Lockwood felt singularly sorry for his friend. As his eyes sought the stained arm around which a blood-soaked handkerchief was bound tightly, he wondered vaguely how McGrail's gun had exploded without tearing away the entire arm or shoulder. But the wound was bad enough, he assured himself; the arm was still swelling, though the blood flow had abated somewhat. The hand, too, had an ugly appearance. Lockwood bent over suddenly, examining the whitened fingers. A look of concern passed over his face.

"Freezing!" he muttered incredulously.

McGrail moved spasmodically and opened his eyes.

"What?" he asked weakly. Lockwood straightened.

"I've been up the beach, this side and the other. You were right, the boat's gone. Drifted away. Blew away in the squall."

"There is nothing to do, then, but trust to a kindly fate, eh?" There was a touch of bravado in McGrail's smile.

"You'd better pin your hopes on the long chance that one of the lumbermen may happen to see us on his way to town," returned Lockwood, squatting on the sand. "Otherwise, we're sunk."

"You really think so?"

"Yes."

"You might try it without me," said the wounded man, nodding toward the mainland, "You've got the strength of an ox."

"Not in that Besides. sea. wouldn't."

Keith Lockwood rose and blew the warmth of his breath into his cold hands. Pulling up his coat collar against the bite of the wind, he walked across the beach, scanning the far-off shoreline and following it northward until it blurred and faded into the mist. He knew that the lumber camp was up there, though too distant to be of any possible benefit. His gaze shifted back to a solitary cabin directly opposite the bar. There, for years, he had spent the duck season. The narrowest band of surrounding water lay between it and the bar. With a stroke of good luck he might swim it, he argued, and, if successful, return in a boat for McGrail. But at this season of the year there were no boats, other than his own, within miles; and the water was near the freezing point. He abandoned the idea and wandered up the

Lockwood's thoughts turned to the young wife he had left in the city. He

wondered vaguely what she might be doing. Busy about the house, perhaps. She always liked to tinker. Playing the old piano in the library, maybe, and singing; safe, anyway, within the confines of a civilized establishment. was glad of that. The thought of their deeply contrasting occupations at the moment pervaded his mind with a sense of the unreality of his own predicament. Here, not far from a complacent civilization, he had found himself suddenly face to face with a situation which yesterday he would have believed impossible. It was still impossible, he told himself, but as he turned back toward the wounded man, his heart sank. He was trapped, and he knew that he was.

"What did you see?" queried Mc-Grail as Keith approached,

"Nothing-nothing at all."

"Look here, Keith. I don't like to be dramatic. As an attorney I am somewhat calloused to drama. But it strikes me that between us we have about one chance in a hundred of getting back to the mainland. That chance rightly belongs to you. There is nothing you can do for me that you have not done already; there is nothing you will be able to do for me that I shall not be able, to do alone. It will be growing dark before long, and the sea is getting heavy. You'd better go while there is still an opportunity of getting through."

The words did not impress Lockwood. He conjured up a mental picture of the outcome of the oncoming night; the probable fate of himself, as well as the bitter but undeniable one of his friend. A slow anger took hold of him as he scanned the sea. He was being decisively, hopelessly, outplayed by a master hand. At length he said:

"Out of the question, positively!"

"What difference," persisted Mc-Grail, "what possible difference can it make? Your staying can be of no benefit, and you have a wife, obligations. .I have none."

Keith wheeled about.

"Do I look like a man who'd run?"
"No," responded the sick man quietly; "nor do you look like the crazy ass I am beginning to believe you. The trouble with you, Keith—and it has been so always—is your indomitable stubbornness and your sometimes mistaken sense of honor. Discretion still continues to be the better part of valor."

Lockwood smiled.

"Be that as it may, here I am, and

here I stay."

McGrail did not continue at once. Instead he lay quite still, his eyes closed. a peculiar expression on his face. The telltale lines of excessive dissipation, which always before had been evident enough, now seemed doubly pronouncedagainst the increasing pallor of his skin. Lockwood, sinking cross-legged to the sand, contemplated this: something unreal there; something unbelievable in the transformation. Yet he knew that it was a natural manifestation, an indelible check on McGrail's code of life. His present condition served only to deepen the contrast. McGrail had been like that always-a study in contrasts.

As the criminal attorney in a crowded court room, Walter McGrail was far removed from the man about town who later swung down the boulevard, gay, care free. Slouching in his chair beside the legal bench, insolent, indifferent, McGrail would sit with half-closed eyes, awaiting his eleventh-hour attack. Apparently satiated with his surroundings. he took little heed of the forbidding array of attorneys generally pitted against him. When the psychological moment of the trial was at hand, he would rise slowly from his chair, and with a handkerchief elevated to his lips, as if to conceal the fleeting expression of mockery beneath, turn toward the judicial bench.

McGrail spoke deliberately, yet with an easy flow of words, a dramatic appeal that was gripping, endeavoring always to construct an impregnable bar-

rier between the jury and the opposing counsel. Sometimes he failed; generally he succeeded. But, beneath the acknowledged brilliancy of his legal appeals, there lay a faint irony, a sort of indefinite insult which none quite understood, though many had felt. There seemed to be neither explanation nor excuse for it, save that it was a part of McGrail, the attorney.

Perhaps not because of his talent, but, at least, in spite of his idiosyncrasies, the man had become extremely popular. Latterly there had been many women attending his cases. These McGrail contemplated from the bar with a detached inquisitiveness, while the veteran court reporter smiled. Occasionally, at the termination of some lengthy technical wrangle, the attorney would glance impatiently at his wrist watch, and, leaning familiarly toward the presiding jurist, murmur a few words into his ear. The smile on the face of the court reporter invariably broadened: McGrail had an engagement somewhere on the Avenue, or, perhaps, in the rear of the courtroom.

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Lockwood, sitting in the sand beside this man, knew these things; understood them better, perhaps, than the veteran court reporter. It was women, always women—insatiable. His court, his feminine acquaintances—who, lacking the niceties of one virtue, had, at least, the redeeming qualities of another—were McGrail's life, an existence which amused him. Which amused him more, Lockwood did not know,

McGrail, immaculate and colorful, swinging a polished cane as he walked briskly down a busy thoroughfare in the late afternoon, was undeniably different in manner and in bearing from the sullen attorney who earlier in the day had risen slowly from his chair and, in a vicious attack, had defeated what he knew to be the just function of the law. Unscrupulous and cunning before the bar, yet smiling and debonair in the

street; a man whom a staid society went out of its way to cultivate, forgetting with surprising facility his unwholesome shortcomings.

As Keith's thoughts followed Mc-Grail's eccentric life into its more intimate details, the wounded man opened his eyes. With a pain that seemed to sicken him, he dragged himself into a

sitting position.

"Keith," he said at length meditatively, "before you fully make up your mind to an act of folly by permitting your false ideas to keep you here, and while I am still able, I want to spin a yarn for you. It's an old tale with a new twist, concerning some one—vitally affecting some one—who is not here; and, because you have the mischance to be here now, likewise affecting you. I say affecting you, because I am about to pass on to you an obligation which you cannot refuse."

Lockwood smiled: McGrail, the attorney, talking again in a crowded court-

room,

"Hold on, Keith," cut in the sick man wearily; "nothing like that. You're dead wrong for once. There is no object in melodrama here, is there? No reason for circumvention between you and me? Just plain talk, then."

Raising his hand with a characteristic gesture, McGrail touched his white lips.

"A strange pose," he added.

Lockwood pulled his hunting jacket higher over his broad shoulders. "All right, Walter," he said, "let's

have it."

McGrail's hand left his lips.

"Perhaps it was a coincidence," he began slowly; "one of those singular things which shows up once in a lifetime and leaves you wondering just what it was all about and why it happened to you. I don't know,

"Late one afternoon last year, the day the Pollock trial ended, I was at the club for a dinner engagement. I had finished dressing and had just gone into

the library when an attendant overtook me, saying that some one had inquired for me downstairs. I followed the boy down to one of the guest rooms and went in. The room was lighted only dimly by long lamps above the numerous paintings on the walls, and at first I could make out no one. I was about to leave, thinking the boy had made a mistake, when, at the far end of the room, I saw a woman. She stood very still, her face turned away slightly toward a painting of the Mojave.

"I was not distinctly impressed from a distance. She seemed very feminine, that was all. I crossed the room and stood a few feet away, waiting for her to observe me. Then, at once, it struck me that there was something remarkable in the averted face, an expression—something. The outline of her cheek was extremely pale, a sort of alabaster whiteness, which seemed intensified by the bright-red curve of her lips.

"Startled, she turned when I spoke. I remember how she tilted her head as she looked up at me. There was a kind of wistful loveliness in her eyes when she smiled. Her voice was soft, expressive. She had come on business,

and would I advise her.

"There was nothing unusual in her case save that she brought it to me: a story of a woman too much alone; of a husband, who, finding himself on the up road of business, devoted nine tenths of his time to his work and one tenth to his wife. The result was that she became a victim of nerves and was in a state bordering on melancholia. That she required attention was obvious enough. I told her that, perhaps, she needed the advice of a nerve specialist more than the counsel of an attorney, but she disagreed.

"I don't know how long she talked. I think I could have sat there hours—why I don't know; possibly because I was overly tired, possibly because of the woman herself. I think that was it—

her wonderful femininity. As I sat there listening, answering her questions, it seemed to me that here, at last, in this woman who was only a young girl grown suddenly older, was that indefinite charm, that unspeakable tenderness, which once I had believed in. You know, Keith."

Lockwood nodded. He did not know exactly. In fact, he was not sure that he understood McGrail at all. The throbbing pain, the cold, Keith thought, was telling on him.

"Better lie down, Walter," he said.

"You're looking ragged." "After a while, when she was leaving," continued McGrail, "I told her that, if I could be of any possible assistance, to call upon me. I thought that it might help. Well, she did comeoften. You see, she was alone, and I was an outlet, some one to talk to. That was the reason-the only possible reason. But each time she somehow threw me off my guard, and each time what little professional viewpoint I had had became more obscure, and the woman herself paramount. The realization of what was happening came too late to counteract. I did not know, could not believe it, until, for a while, she did not come. It swept over me then like a flood. Well, I went away. You re-

"When I returned, I told her there was nothing more I could do for her professionally. She understood; she was very fine about it all. I think I shall never forget that afternoon, the way she stood in the doorway, looking at me as she fastened her coat. It meant nothing to her, you know, that we should not meet again—not in the same sense it did to me. She put her hand on the latch and said slowly, 'There is nothing I can say to you. Thank you—and I'm sorry,' I can still hear the door closing behind her."

member that.

As the sick man talked, a peculiar depression settled over Lockwood. He

felt, somehow, tremendously sorry for McGrail. He turned toward him.

"I understand, Walter. Rotten luck
-rotten luck."

"If that were all, I would not be telling you this tale. All this is preliminary, explanatory, to the thing I want to say to you now."

McGrail's voice was noticeably weaker. With an effort he went on:

"In a monogramed locket on my watch chain is her picture. It does not make any appreciable difference how it got there; that is incidental; but the fact is, unfortunately, that my locket is in your cabin, fastened to the chain on my vest."

Keith turned toward his friend in amazement.

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"Good heavens, man! You can't go running around with pictures of married women in your pocket. If that leaked out, there'd be the deuce of a row!"

"Exactly." The uncertain but unmistakable slur crept into McGrail's voice.
"You see"—he smiled faintly—"you have an obligation—a gentleman's obligation."

A feeling of dull upheaval shook Keith as he sat staring at the sand. Suddenly he got to his feet.

"All right, Walter," he said as his fingers pulled at the buttons of his jacket, "I'll go."

The sick man sank back upon the sand. His voice was barely audible when, at length, he spoke again.

"You're ready now, eh? Well, when you see her just give her back the picture. She'll understand.

"You will see her, of course," he added. "You couldn't miss her. Something wonderful in her smile, a sort of wistful loveliness you've never seen before. Good luck!"

Lockwood, naked, his muscles set against the sting of the wind, hesitated. The wasted figure of his friend, curved against the cold strip of sand, filled him with sudden pity. He bent over and

touched the stiff white fingers of Mc-Grail's uninjured hand:

"I'm sorry, Walter; tremendously

sorry—for everything."

The words as he spoke them seemed surprisingly inadequate; a banal, meaningless farewell. He turned quickly and

a moment later plunged into the swirling water.

Gasping from the severe shock, Keith rose to the surface and struck out strongly toward the far-off mainland. The acuteness of the water served at first to accelerate the motion of his body, and suddenly he realized that, with the bar only a few rods behind, he was rapidly growing tired. Immediately he rolled on his back, floating relaxed in the trough of the swells, propelling himself hastily onward as they advanced silently upon him.

His mind returned to McGrail repeatedly as he went on. The man he had left on the bar was entirely different from the man who had been his friend through many years. There was a new contrast again, a new McGrail; or, perhaps, mused Keith, the old McGrail, the one he had known as a boy. That he had been guilty of an unfortunate indiscretion with this woman was obvious; an indiscretion in the sense that he had encouraged her visits to his office. But,

whatever McGrail's feelings had been to-

ward other women, this once, at least, he

had risen above them. He had proved

his attitude toward her by the indifferent courage with which he had made his

final reckoning.

Lockwood went on. In the waters beyond the protection of the bar he became careful, watching the heaving swells closely as they swept around him. Slowly, distinctly, his great arms rose and fell, pulling him onward through the gray waste of water. From his own observations there seemed to be no satisfying advance. At times, when some larger swell carried him on its crest, he could see the mainland, still as re-

mote, as unattainable as ever. Yet—he looked backward—there was a good distance between himself and the receding bar. This, he told himself, was encouraging. He would bend every effort now, every mental factor, every physical asset, toward the one objective ahead.

For a time Keith swam easily. Cramps had not interfered, and nothing seemed radically wrong with the functioning of his body. As he progressed, his thought again returned to McGrail. So that was why he had gone away so suddenly months ago-this woman. Well, he had gone away again. Perhaps, if McGrail's gun had not exploded, he might yet be returning once more. He, Keith, still had a fighting chance, a slim one, to be sure, yet a fighting chance, a hope that he might pull through, somehow. But for Mc-Grail there had not been at any time through the last few indelible hours even the flicker of hope. A sportsman without a sporting gamble. Keith paused suddenly. From the faint roar of the breakers in the distance, he judged that he was approaching the halfway mark.

Lockwood considered his physical fitness. He was indifferently surprised at his endurance. At first the intensity of the cold had taken his breath and alarmed him. Now that no longer bothered greatly. His hands and feet had lost their acute ache; they were merely numb now. This, he knew, was to be expected, and likewise the slow, dull pain that centered in his throat and crept downward. He twisted over on his back again. The sky was unbelievably gray, a thick, colorless blanket which advanced and retreated with remarkable agility, one moment closing over him, the next waving far away. This was an odd pastime, lying on his back and watching the sky do gymnastics. A silent swell, rolling up from behind, put an abrupt end to Lockwood's momentary wanderings. He floundered, choking, and once more struck out toward the still distant shore

Less sure of himself, Keith moved slowly, conserving his strength for that greater effort he knew to lie ahead. With the slackening of his speed he became uneasy. He was becoming aware of the growing numbness of his body. Overexertion or the advancing numbness: which, he wondered, might prove the more destructive? Neither mattered greatly; to hold steady, to go on-that was the big thing. As his arms flashed alternately in and out, he counted their backward thrust. The ceaseless rythm of movement, the monotonous sequence of numbers, began to fluster him. endeavored to recall with what frequency his arms slipped by the hundred mark. He did not know, but each time it was becoming more difficult to reach. Keith Lockwood began to doubt.

In endless succession the swells billowed around him and passed stoically Their easy, rapid progress made his own appear amazingly slow. Occasionally one showed white at its crest. Keith knew that, for him, that fringe of foam indicated the commencement of the real hazard of the sea-the terrific strength of the breakers. With this apprehension came the increasing doubt of his ultimate victory. He was alone in a melodramatic situation which called for a superhuman effort, the capacity for which he felt he did not possess. Gradually his old stubbornness asserted itself: the sea would never find a man whom it would have greater difficulty in defeating: of this he was positive. And, if the increasing cold and fatigue at length worked upward into his brain, his body would still go on; go on until, perhaps, in that turmoil nearer the shore, some breaker would roll up from behind and with destructive eagerness smother his breath with its foam. He would cease to struggle then. "Commit his body to the deep, looking for the general resurrection-through Christ."

He looked backward from the height of a heavy swell. The bar had vanished. In front, then, not far in front, was the mainland. Keith closed his eves. The ache in his throat and chest was unbearable, but from beneath his shoulder blades a comfortable numbness began to steal toward the back of his neck. He set his teeth and hoped. Abruptly and without warning a wave broke over him. Keith felt himself being flung into obscurity. Fiercely he fought his way back while the wave passed over. Again on the surface he struck out blindly, No conservation of strength now; this was the crowded hour. The faint, sliding swish of another early breaker issued its warning too late. There was a momentary glimpse of a towering bank of gray-green water, a fleeting view of the sky, and the heavy, violent concussion of a liquid mass, pounding with terrific energy against his body.

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As he struggled up through the obliterating flood, a slow haziness began to crawl into Lockwood's brain. He realized dully that, if this continued, he would never reach the glimmering mirage of the shore. As time wore on he was not so sure that even this was. after all, vital. What difference? The pain was too sickening, the odds too There would be a woman with her name in the newspapers. She would change her name and move away. That What difference? was all. thing wonderful in her smile; a sort of wistful loveliness vou've never seen before." Well? But the instinct of selfpreservation, the subconscious remembrance of his mission, goaded Keith on while the waves broke over his body with increasing frequency.

Battered and buffeted by the merciless breakers, now flung headlong into their roaring oblivion, now rushed forward on their crests, Lockwood floundered. The physical animation of his body, detaching itself from his waning consciousness, dragged him on. There were no thoughts in his mind now; one idea, one uncertain objective, illumined the darkness closing over him. Each succeeding wave found him rising desperately, more wearily, to the surface. Through a terrifying period he fought.

Suddenly a gigantic breaker caught him sharply from the side, and, lifting him high in the air, smashed his overtaxed body into the obscurity beneath. Rolling and twisting while the gray flood thundered and seethed above, Keith struggled frantically toward the top. As his head emerged from the water the last gleam of hope flickered and went out. Mechanically one arm moved forward in an heroic effort to continue, and the sea beat in a far-off murmur.

Quietly, easily, Lockwood drifted toward oblivion. Through the gray haze that enveloped him, he sank slowly and deliberately downward, Complete rest here; utter cessation of weariness. Suddenly, with a faint shock, his feet struck something firm, an irregular surface. With a hysterical effort his legs pushed against it and he shot upward. the sea caught him in its flood and again his legs responded. There followed a series of violent shocks which jarred Lockwood's obfuscated brain into action. Slowly he opened his eyes. A few rods ahead lay the beach. With a look of amazement, Lockwood got to his feet, staggered through the clinging water, and sank exhausted on the wet

Moments later the lifeless figure stirred. With tremendous weariness he regained his feet. Swaying dangerously, he paused for a brief interval to regain enough strength to go on. Then, his great hulk sagging, he shuffled uncertainly across the beach and pushed open the cabin door.

Save where a few embers glowed in the ashes of a wood fire, it was dark inside the room. Through the deep gloom Lockwood groped toward the fireplace, and laboriously threw a birch

log on the dying embers. His hand felt along the stone mantel above and mechanically closed over a half-emptied whisky flask. Clumsily he opened it and drank off the contents.

As he returned the flask to its place on the mantel, the dry birch in the fireplace ignited and flamed up, illuminating the rough interior of the cabin. Keith turned. He had come for something. Near by on a chair his eyes encountered McGrail's vest. Issuing from the hiatus of a pocket was the locket. In the flickering firelight the thin gold disk shone brightly against the dark disarray of clothing. From the corner of his eve Lockwood viewed it with a peculiar expression of suspicion. There was something unreal, mysterious, about it. This small, shining thing was the pivotal point around which revolved a series of impossible happenings: McGrail's love affair; his own struggle with the sea; some woman's name. He reached forward and with a jerk broke the locket from its slender chain.

Keith Lockwood, in a waning stupor, lay in his bed. Through a confused and tangled darkness people called his name. Wearily he wished they would stop. The sea kept breaking over him, and there was a locket to be gotten. The murmur died away; one voice now:

"Keith! Keith!"

Yes, yes, he was coming. The voice drew nearer:

"Keith."

He could feel the warm breath against his face. Lockwood opened his eyes. A woman sat on the edge of the bed, bending over him. He nodded reassuringly.

"I'm all right," he said weakly. "Everything is all right. You know," he added slowly as his wife lowered her face to his, "when you smile like that, there's something wonderful about you. A sort of wistful loveliness I've never herers."

seen before."

By Robert Wilson Hawkins



URTHER down the point, half hidden by the mist which lazily spiraled up from the swamp, the evelike camp fires of the Indians sparkled against the dark green of the Across the bay, now silvered with the first hint of the rising sun, lay the age-old hills, and clinging precariously against their sides the little town of La Paz, Behind him, half muffled in the gloom, he heard the sleepy mutterings of the two arduana guards, lounging on the dock. A faint rumble. more imagined than heard, told of the

incoming vessel.

Seated on a pile of hawser, he drew his slicker closer about him, for the damp air cut like a knife, and waited for the day. Somehow, although he liked to sleep late, these early morning vigils were the happiest times in his life. In the first place, he was alone, unmolested by the usual buzz and chatter of the narrow-minded circle which lived on the point. On days which were to see the fruit boats loaded he was called by the office watchman, usually at three, and with a great deal of grousing turned out of his bed, from under his musty fly bar, into a chill and most damnably damp darkness. A quick. breathless dash into the waters of the bay, which tinkled musically against the piling beneath his quarters, a quicker, shivering return, a vigorous rub down, and a hasty tumbling into his clothes, and, as the men laughingly had it, he was "all set;" followed a stumbling walk to the cook house for two scalding cups of the bitter, native coffee, and, a deceitfully black cigaro between his teeth, he strolled down to the dock.

Always, he reflected, that nigger called him too early; always he sat for ages on the dock awaiting the boat, which seemed never to come. Always he determined to call the faithful black down for his promptness, and always, as the sun came out and the world brightened, he thanked the self-same boy for his faithfulness.

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The sun was just showing now, against the dark, unbelievable blue of the sea, shining brazenly between the palms which bordered the point, and burning away, as if by magic, the mists and vapors which hung tenaciously about the ugly brown-and-yellow buildings of the settlement. Across the bay, the town was now clearly seen, the white façade of the ancient church standing out clear against the 'dobe brown of the other buildings. A sleepy bugle sounded from across the six watery miles as the bare-footed, feverridden garrison was roused for another day of aimless scratching.

A sudden blare from the machineshop whistle called upon the others to rise and work, and the faint whistle from the still invisible fruit train told that his duties would soon call him. A hearty curse from within the custom house showed that the pompous inspector was awake, and the two sleepy Fever 157

guards lazily rose and stretched. Slowly, as if a dream ship, the white and truly beautiful vessel slipped silently around the tip of the point, nosed cautiously past the shoals which made a mariner's nightmare of the bay, and with a satisfied, triumphant blast of the siren swung around the pier head, nosing into her berth alongside.

As if by magic, the dock grew crowded as the laborers grasped the hurled lines and hawsers, and, under the profane but certain directions of the patron, made fast the steamer. Now appeared the doctor, cheerful, good-natured, and immaculate as always, walking quickly beside the larger bulk of the superintendent-confound his importance!-and the nervous, alert little Latin. With a great deal of ceremony the three mounted the gangway, the two sleepy natives presented arms, raggedly, as they did everything; and, by way of contrast, the captain and purser, waiting at the companion head, saluted snappily. The little group of officials went below, and a cluster of goggle-eyed tourists lined the rail, their air of superiority enhanced by the correctly tailored clothes they wore. They bought them, of course, because custom so dictated, and the steamship company's prospectus so advised. A swiftly growing clatter from down the yard, a fierce puffing from the little engine, a ridiculous toot from her peanutroaster whistle, and the first train load of fruit was in.

The officials, their cursory examination of passenger list and manifest completed, appeared at the rail, although, as always, they would accept the expected and never neglected invitation to breakfast aboard; the captain nodded to his first officer, standing on the rail forward, and the decks swarmed with the fruit handlers and stevedores. Swiftly the conveyors were placed—huge, mechanical arms which hurled fruit up and over the towering sides,

down again, swiftly yet gently, into the vessel's gaping hold. Thin-chested. dandified native checkers appeared by the conveyor tables, ready to tally the fruit from the cars. A black bracero whistled warningly from the roof of the first car of the string as the switch engine backed its cut of cars out upon the dock, signaled frantically with his outstretched arms, and spotted the car doors at the conveyors. As he threw in the switch which gave life and power to the machine, the bare-footed negroes clambered, apelike, to their places, and a soft, slithery rustling from the cars told of trash pushed overside as the work began.

Hoarse shouts from the native gang foreman, answering gutturals from the men, and swift streams of green bananas moved into the holds. Each stem apparently the same, yet each, to the experienced, different, each requiring some little twist properly to place it, to keep it from bruising on its long trip north, to the States. The smaller fruit, "sixes" and "sevens" above, the larger "eight and nine-hand" stems be-

The States—fool, civilized place, where everything went just so, every one did just so, or suffered, if they didn't, for not doing so. Conventions, well-ordered lives, willful deceptions as to realities through judicious use of correct-sounding words, masking real facts. Here, thank Heaven, it was different, if you willed it. Here you could escape the painfully correct crowd on the point, and, midway be-

the frank and open disregard for conventions in the quarters.

low.

Here lived the outcasts, the roughnecks of the place, old men and young, "tropical tramps" and greenhorns, alike in their dislikes, doing their work, when they worked, well; taking their fun, when they did, heartily; drinking, gambling, love-making—all with a pro-

tween that and "nigger town," enjoy

found, not to be feigned, dislike and scorn for the conventional, white-collar folk who frowned, from their self-sufficient, superior, well-bred and poorly paid height, upon the well-paid, denim and khaki-clad group of workers. "The Palace of Virtue" they had dubbed the place, laughing at the outraged sense of propriety shown by the pen pushers at their frank and open revels.

Damn conventions! He'd never liked them-never heeded them, except where usage demanded. He hadn't escaped them, though. They'd had their chance at him, torn him asunder, spewed him out. He didn't fit in, and here he was. Their love-making had been unconventional, he admitted, although he no longer, as formerly, gloried in it. didn't seem glorious now, somehow. She had been unconventional, too, or hadn't she? Had all her attentions, all those wonderful hours together, been really spontaneous, or had she been merely looking for a "kick?" Had she really tired-of him, as she had tired of her husband, been glad of a chance to lose him, or had the other fellow been a real attraction, more desirable than he had been? Was her reason for unfaithfulness to him an ennui? Or had she really liked the other chap so well, had she really been attracted to him so strongly? Or was she merely following the hysterically conventional mob of war-disturbed women when she took up the new affair? He remembered how he'd been hit, pole-axed, at first, contemplated suicide, but lacked the courage, really quite overcome, not merely by self-pity, but by the blow to his trust.

He laughed softly to himself as he automatically looked over the work about him; laughed at his first frantic surge of self-pity. She'd certainly landed a body blow, whatever the motive. As they had so often done before, the years came back again—the

black despair when he had first imagined something lacking; the newly established camp near home; his enlistment; the weary, ill-managed weeks at senseless drill and formation; the first, long-delayed pay day-the rest of the boys had, at least, enjoyed the pay, but he'd been unconventional there as well; gone to town; sweated for hours over the out-of-order telephone, trying to get a long-distance call through to her. It had cost him a bawling out from the skipper, but it had been worth it. Even though he had been hours late in the return to camp, he'd heard her voice quite clearly, for a wonder, heard the faint echoes of her music, too.

She'd done well that time; she'd actually hauled up a sob from somewhere, and it had come to him over the thin thread of wire clearly. "Her hero!" Usual movie bunk, but he'd believed it, of course; he'd believe anything in those days. Funny, too, the day he'd been transferred, along with several hundred other poor fish, to fight in the "Battle of the South," gone within twenty miles of the town; but, although she had always plenty of time to drive that dinky ambulance around the country, it had been impossible to get over to see him. Good enough! He hated scenes, and, ten to one, he'd have made a mess of At last, the release from the thing. service, his almost childish delight in sloughing off the ugly drab uniform, the delight of the almost forgotten slackness about his legs when he stepped into civies again, the sense of freedom as he watched the unfortunate, not yet discharged puppets obey the beck and call of the coldly superior officers; the impatience of the endless, tiring trip from camp, the breathless rush through the rainy dark to surprise her, and then- The cool and matter-of-fact reception tendered by the family, the thinly veiled, properly disgusted air of moral aloofness they possessed. The evasions, the slurs, the almost endless

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delays, and, at last, so unlike his planning, the truth, with the nurse conveniently within call; her tearful confession; his cold, yet carefully veiled hurt, lest he snuff out the life which he cherished, then, as now—although its love was dead—above all else.

The cold shame consuming him as he faced the husband; the cold shame which struggled madly with the burning desire to shout aloud the truth: he was not to blame; it was not he! And then, a realization of the old saw: "Sauce for the goose-" Well, here he was out of it all. Unable to ion the boys in all their trips to the "line," known as the woman hater: content to have it so; eved askance, because of his patent disregard for them, by the women of the settlement. Nothing to bother about now; no damnable ambition to struggle for; earning enough to live on; willing to forget.

These confounded tourists—muddling in everything, getting in the way. The faint breath of something which clung to them—something which carried you back, against your will, carried you back, too far back, to best forgotten places, bringing up memories.

With a shrug he cast off his morbid mood, and went aboard, down to the foredeck upon which were already scattered heaps of discarded fruit. A word or two to his foreman, and he gave over the checking, turning back along the deck to the engine-room hatch, reeking of hot oil and sweat. The grizzled, true-to-tradition, dour old engineer, McAndrew, with a fund of humor and reminiscence beneath his shell. The smoke room, pleasantly cool and quiet now, compared with the hot wharf, before the night's rush of the young bucks who would come, clamorous, to swill their liquor. The purser, laughably proper and businesslike-a sort of machine-papers, bills of lading, passenger lists. Breakfast with the mate, relieved now by the second, in the quiet white-and-gold saloon. These boats did themselves well. Breakfast but half over, of course, and interruption came: something wrong with a conveyor, and no use at all in bothering him. He was no mechanic, didn't pretend to be. Why couldn't these niggers ever learn?

The frouble attended to, he paused by the companion before returning to the saloon again. Funny, that scent! Cut right through the tar and oil; seemed to float above all the every-day smells: the salt, the dead, fishy smell of the backwater, and the dead-andgone odors of the mangrove swamps. Exotic; made you think—remember—strangled your content—reminded you! Returning reason, what twaddle! Lots of fool women used that same stuff.

The two best staterooms were next the companionway. She always did do things well-always! The best rooms, the best pictures, music. The best lovers? A new conceit that! Let's see, stewards are all busy below deck now; no one about. Will the door creak? Some scandal for the mob! What if he was right, or, on the other hand, what if he wasn't? A quick glance down the long, cabin-bordered alley. The knob was turning; and the first faint knock brought response—a sleepy, well-remembered jumble of words, surely never used by any one else-a word as personal as anything could be.

Well-defined, self-made barriers between himself and the fools, conventional, well-bred fools, who didn't understand, melted, were not, and, breathless, he stood before her again. Curse her, oh, curse her! As wonderful, as beautiful, as desired as ever, the very essence of so many wild, troubled dreams, the reincarnation of his heart. The same gestures, the same terms of endearment, the same lips, and two years were not. Tear-brimmed eyes, red lips, soft arms about him——Blah!

Talks With Ainslee's Readers

F there is one human failing that has gripped more individuals and nations than any other it is, perhaps, the lust for power. Seven or eight years ago one heard discussion, academic and commonplace, on the subject, which then engaged business clerk and statesman, as well as the more universal figure, the man in the trenches or in a dank submarine. To-day the individual man or woman is again the unit, rather than regiments and battalions, and one speaks again in terms of single human figures rather than of standardized groups of a nation's men. And it is the foibles or the significant virtues of a man or of a woman that engage the attention of the daily news agents and others who chronicle life as it is lived.

THERE was in Washington, identified with its social life, a gay and charming young matron, who excelled in beauty as she did in the mixing of a cocktail. And while she confined her activity to the running of her own fairsized menage and to the diverting of her small group of intimates, she ranked well as hostess and friend. There came into her ken, however, the dapper representative of a foreign country. And her sensitive imagination was so stimulated by the tales which he wove for her about his country's golden sunlight and its hidden riches, that she fancied herself by and by elected of the gods to reign over that fabulous small land of which he spoke. More and more she withdrew from the sane contemplation of her daily activity and meditated with lust on the wealth and power which lay unused there in that far-off land. The story of how she sought to acquire the dream kingdom for which she hungered is one of the most exciting we have read in many days. We recommend most enthusiastically Berthe K. Mellett's latest novelette, "The Empress." You will find it complete in the October number.

DISILLUSIONMENT is perhaps the most heartbreaking experience that comes to most of us. The sudden realization that one has for a while worshiped at a spurious shrine is more than humiliating; it is devastating of one's self-respect. Donaldson, third mate of a good ship which put in at an African port periodically, had for a certain lovely lady the same worshiping reverence which most of his shipmates shared. She was the gracious embodiment of all his dreams. Until a certain dark night, which he can never again forget. As moving a story and as exquisitely wrought as you will read over a long period is one in the next number called "Madame Rodney, Africa," by an author new to our pages, Clarence Cisin.

ONE of the most gifted young writers who contribute to AINSLEE'S. one whose output is unfortunately conservatively small, is Mildred Cram. Miss Cram's occasional stories bring always a flood of enthusiastic comment in their wake. More discerningly than most, Miss Cram reproduces life of every sort in its subtlest mani-For the October number festations. she has written one of the strongest, most gripping stories of her career. It deals with a phase of a charming woman's life that few other authors would have the courage to undertake nor the kindness of heart to interpret mercifully with sensitive understanding. "False Face" by Mildred Cram, in the next number of AINSLEE's, is a dramatic and completely engaging short All

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(Mrs. P. F. Robin, Mobile, Ala.)

(A letter from Mr. T. C. Hinkle of Baldwin, Kan.)



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Second Prize, 5.00, M. E. Donovan, 30 Oakview Terrace, Jamaica Plain, Mass.

For letter submitted on Ivory Garter.

Third Prize, 3.00. Julia D. Carder, 460 West 140th St., New Yo

Third Prize, 3.00, Julia D. Carder, 460 West 140th St., New York City.

For letter submitted on The American Tobacco Co.

Fourth Prize, 2.00, George R. Lee, Brentwood, Md.

For letter submitted on Bull Durham.

July winners will be announced in October Ainslee's

THE FINAL CONTEST

It will be practically impossible for us to continue the ad contest on account of the flood of mail that has risen each month. Nevertheless, we are grateful to our readers for their response. We believed it would be hearty, but it has long since surpassed our most liberal calculations.

With greatest thanks to all our appreciative and responsive readers, we are,

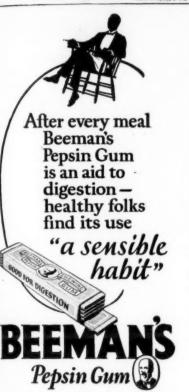
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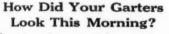
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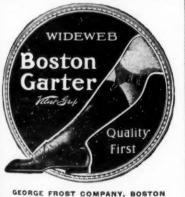
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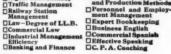
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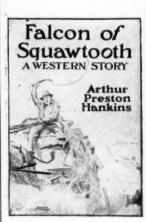
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